MOON OF VALLEYS

DAVID WHITELAW

Miss Free,

21, Lower Range Road.

Gravesend

With best wishes for a merry Xmas and happy New Year from Dais.

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MOON OF VALLEYS

"I'm going to drive you to Exeter, Mr. Burns."

See p. 303.

MOON OF VALLEYS

A ROMANCE

BY

DAVID WHITELAW

AUTHOR OF "PRINCESS GALVA," "THE GANG" ETC.

POPULAR EDITION

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THE PRINCESS GALVA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE LITTLE AFFAIR AT THE "BRIDGE"	11
II.	INTRODUCES EDDIE DOCKERTY	15
III.	THE JEW	21
IV.	LEAH WOOLF	33
V.	"MOON OF VALLEYS"	45
VI.	THE MAN FROM THE EAST	51
VII.	WALLY BURNS PREPARES FOR A NEW RÔLE	58
VIII.	AN ERRAND OF JUSTICE	67
IX.	ON BOARD THE *RAMAYANA*	74
X.	MUTTU	82
XI.	MR CHUNDER MAKES HIMSELF OBJECTIONABLE	93
XII.	THE WATCHERS	103
XIIa.	WHAT THE DUTCHMAN KNEW OF '*THE MOON*'	115
XIV.	WALLY TAKES FAREWELL OF MR CHUNDER	127
XV.	IN THE CAVE	135
XVI.	LEAH'S DIARY	146
XVII.	WALLY MAKES A GREAT EFFORT	153
XVIII.	THE CLUE	164
XIX.	HERBERT TAKES UP LEAH'S STORY	176
XX.	HERBERT'S STORY (*continued*)	185
XXI.	SITAGAMA	195
XXII.	THE FOURTH WINDOW	208

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIII.	The Grave in the Jungle	218
XXIV.	Leah's Diary	229
XXV.	The Deserters	234
XXVI.	The Further Treachery of Wally Burns	242
XXVII.	The 'Rotter'	253
XXVIII.	A Deal in Precious Stones	268
XXIX.	Leah's Diary	276
XXX.	The Strand Again	285
XXXI.	Wally is Driven to Exeter	296
XXXII.	The Earl	305
XXXIII.	Reconciliation	313
XXXIV.	At Epgrave Towers	319

MOON OF VALLEYS

CHAPTER I

THE LITTLE AFFAIR AT THE "BRIDGE"

CHARLIE KENTER turned away from the hard-faced men at the ticket barrier, and told his friend that they had done the same thing twenty years back.

For the powers that be had decreed that this particular Gatwick should be a model of all that a race meeting ought to be, and, with that laudable object in view, had assembled detectives from the provincial centres to join their metropolitan brethren at the barriers of London Bridge. From Birmingham they came, and from Manchester—Nottingham, too, and Leicester—and stood, a stern company watching the faces of all who presented tickets. It was said afterwards, that not one wrong 'un got through.

In little disconsolate groups 'the boys'

stood about the station-yard, umbrella-men, lumberers, rorters, minders—all the riff-raff that comprises the outskirts of the Sport of Kings. Each whistle of the departing trains sounded the knell of their hopes, and sadly they made their way over the bridge or back into the Borough.

Charlie Kenter took his friend's arm and led the way to an adjacent saloon.

"Yes—twenty years ago—my dad used to tell me how he got through. He was the only one of the 'boys' who did. Not a single 'tec there who knew him. He used to say he didn't half feel lonely. Goodwood it was that time."

The bar they entered was full of the 'rejected' sportsmen. They discussed in angry groups the scandal—the outrage—they spoke of the liberty of the subject—they were Englishmen—was this a free country? They spoke loudly and drove home their arguments with vigour, thumping their grimy fists in the little pools of beer that covered the bar.

Charlie and his friend chose a corner settee, and sat silent over their drinks. They took the situation more philosophically than the majority. It was all part of the day's work—

they even tried to think that perhaps it was all for the best, and that the result of the races would show them that they had had a 'let off.'

"I wouldn't have known what to back in the three o'clock, anyway. 'Firefly' doesn't run, and that trial the other day fairly makes 'Consul' look like a busted bee in a drain——"

Mr Kenter broke off suddenly and followed the direction of his friend's eye (he had but one), which was staring at the red plush arm that divided their alcove from the next.

Over this arm a covert coat had been thrown, a light brown affair of a distinctly sporting cut. In the portion of the tartan lining that was exposed gaped a breast pocket, out of which protruded a smart little letter case of red morocco. Charlie gazed at it in a kind of fascination. If he had thought at all, he would have considered it a perfectly right thing for him to take this easy revenge against an unjust fate. A mere touch would do it—a shake even should suffice to dislodge the slippery hold of the leather.

He glanced at the occupant of the alcove—evidently the owner of the garment—a small, dark-skinned man of undoubted Indian ex-

traction. He was deep in the columns of the morning paper, and with a wink at his companion to cover his action, Charlie slid his fingers cautiously out, and the deed was done.

. . . . . .

An empty taxi-cab was sliding slowly down the station approach. In a moment the men were inside, and examining their loot.

The small amount of paper money that the case contained was soon divided—a blank cheque form they immediately destroyed as dangerous, and that was all, with the exception of three halfpenny stamps, a few letters, and a scrap of thin paper, recording the fact that a certain Mr Chunder had that morning deposited a bag at the luggage office at Victoria.

At Wellington Street, Kenter left the cab, and opposite the "Gaiety" he ran into Reuben Woolf, who didn't seem a bit pleased to see him.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCES EDDIE DOCKERTY

PEOPLE put Eddie Dockerty down at twenty-five, but that was absurd, because the records at Dartmoor had it in black and white that he was twenty-six in nineteen hundred and one. And Government records are authentic.

The effects of hard labour, after all, are merely a question of the temperaments they act upon. Once Eddie had grown accustomed to the fact that five summers (and, if he behaved himself, four winters) must pass over the peaceful Devonshire vales before he could run up to town again, he determined, with all the force of his abnormal brain, to meet them with a stiff upper lip—nay, more, to profit by them. He made up his mind to treat them as a period of compulsory training, of which his hitherto somewhat irregular

mode of life caused him to stand sorely in need.

And so people in the year of grace nineteen hundred and seven put Eddie Dockerty down at twenty-five. And Eddie Dockerty smiled when he heard them, and did not see any necessity for undeceiving them.

The June sunlight slanted in between the curtains of the long French windows of his well-appointed flat in a Bloomsbury Square, and shed, as it were, a halo around the close auburn curls of Eddie's well-shaped head. To the same long French windows he had drawn up the little table on which was laid out a silver breakfast service.

A splendid rogue was Eddie, and he loved the sun, and the mass of scarlet blossom on the trim little balcony was a source of physical pleasure to him. Does not history tell us that Robespierre was devoted to canaries ?

The placid state of Eddie's mind can be gauged by the pile of unopened letters that lie beside his plate. For a man to read his paper before opening his letters denotes a certain absence of worry that may well be envied. Happy, indeed, is the man who does not fear

his post and can treat the *rat-tat* with indifference.

There had been moments in Dockerty's life when he had waited trembling on the mat with beads of anxiety upon his brow whilst the postman had pushed his morning letters through the box, but that was long ago. That such a time might come again to him, none knew better than Eddie, but he was a man who crossed his bridges as he came to them, and he knew, and could appreciate a harbour when he reached one. A more than usually profitable *coup* in the early part of the year had set him up in the way he wished to live and would continue to provide funds for the same for some considerable time to come. Really, to look at Eddie's unruffled brow as he glanced down the 'probables' for the 'cup,' he might have been only twenty-*three*.

He made a mark or two with his little silver pencil case on the margin of his *Sporting Life*, then his hand, as though acting independently, reached out for the topmost letter of the little pile. There were only four, and the first three were put aside unopened with an air that plainly denoted their unimportance. With the last it was different.

A keen look came into the calm blue eyes of Eddie as he recognised the cramped caligraphy of Reuben Woolf on the envelope. It was the first expression of any consequence that had come into those eyes since he sat down to breakfast.

He turned the envelope over and over in his hands in speculation for a moment, then opened it and read :

Singleton.

My dear Eddie,—What's the matter with Goodwood? It must be something very important—or very nice—to keep you away. I rather want to have a chat with you. I don't know how you feel, but in spite of our abundance of shekels I want to be on the move again. I have an idea that I am on a good thing, and there is room for you on the ground floor if you want to come in. I am at Brighton for August and can put you up and give you a good time. Leah and I have a little furnished house on the front—Steyne Lodge. Come down for the race week and we can do Lewes from there.

By the by, it might expedite matters if you could dig up the Honourable Herbert. Perhaps you could bring him with you. It's only

a little box of a place, but we'll find room for him.

I'll keep an eye for you in the ring to-day. I hear they are not starting "The Butcher" for the big race; they tell me it's a good thing for "Sundial."

Yours ever,

Reub.

As Eddie put the letter in his pocket he knew that the period of his inactivity was drawing to a close. The suggestion was all that had been wanted, and now Woolf's letter had come and stirred him into mental activity. He was perfectly ready, nay, eager for work, and the sooner it came now the better he would like it.

But the Honourable Herbert—what could Reuben want with the aristocratic scribbler? It was always the way with the Jew. His letters rarely told one anything—only left one curious. And now the seed of curiosity was germinating rapidly in Eddie's brain, and he decided that Goodwood was the only place to satisfy him. He certainly had a pleasant appointment up the river, but a wire and a little present would settle that. To think, with Eddie, was to act, and he found himself

searching in the paper for the race trains even before he was aware of his decision.

And so it came about that at three o'clock he stood beside Reuben Woolf in the ring, and saw " Sundial " romp in at the nice price of ' fives.'

CHAPTER III

THE JEW

EDDIE DOCKERTY sat in the garden of the hotel at Singleton. On a little wicker table stood a bottle of Pol Roger and two glasses. He had pushed these aside in order to make room for a small sheet which he had spread out before him. It was apparently of parchment, dark with age and creased into divisions with constant folding. He was regarding it intently with hands outspread, holding it down against the breeze that had sprung up after the heat of the day.

On the other side of the table sat a short man of some fifty years of age. To judge from appearances there was little of the Jew about Reuben Woolf, if one excepts his eyes, which were set near together and shone with the cold and calculating activity peculiar to the Hebrew race. His hair was iron grey, and he wore it cropped close, which, with his short,

pointed and neatly trimmed vandyke, gave to his head the exact shape of an egg. He was dressed in a light grey suit that fitted him to a nicety, his linen was white and spotless. The thin gold watch-chain that stretched across his immaculate waistcoat, and a small black pearl that gleamed dully in his dark red cravat, composed his jewellery.

He was watching his companion intently, his head thrust a little forward and sunk slightly between his shoulders. He gave one the impression of a waiting vulture.

"You'll make nothing of it, Eddie, my boy."

Dockerty looked up from the parchment.

"I'm afraid not—I suppose this is what you want the Honourable Herbert for?"

"Yes—it's Cingalese, as far as I can find out, and I seem to have heard that the Earl of Epgrave had a plantation or something over there once, and that Herbert was with him."

"I believe he did. May I ask where you got this thing and what it is, Reuben?"

The Jew gave a little cough, and took a drink from the tumbler before him.

"From a young gentleman," he said, "who

has been playing it rather considerably on the turf. He says it refers to a hidden jewel of vast worth and with a most romantic history, and asked me to take it in settlement of his Newmarket account. He came down heavily over 'Catgut.' I saw no chance of getting anything else out of him, so I took it. You'll remember that."

"In what way?"

"I mean, will you please remember *that* is the history of this parchment as I have told it to Leah, and as you must tell it to Herbert. He's as straight as a die by all accounts, and if we want his help in the matter we must see he doesn't know the truth."

"Which is——"

"That Charlie 'pinched' it. He's got a bit low since we worked together in the Adderly affair, and he seems fairly up against it. I met him in town last week and he told me he had done a bit of 'dipping'—fancy Charlie Kenter 'dipping.' It was a pocket book—a nice little morocco leather affair. Charlie had taken all the money it contained and offered to let me have the rest for a fiver. I took in his appearance, and knew that if I didn't buy

it he would touch me for the amount without it."

"So you took it?"

"Yes—there was a heap of clutter in it, the only thing that seemed promising was this."

Reuben felt in his breast pocket and produced a letter. "I'll read it," he said.

2 B Throgmorton Buildings,
E.C.

Dear Sir,—Mr Rosenbaum desires me to thank you for your letter. He regrets that he cannot enter into the scheme you mention unless you can give him fuller particulars. Mr Rosenbaum has made enquiries among some of the authorities on Cingalese history, but can find no evidence to support your theory as to the hiding-place of the 'Moon of Valleys.'

In the course of his enquiries, however, he ascertained that such a stone did exist, and in the year 1790 was in the possession of the Rajahs of Kandy. There was a court scandal in connection with it and, I understand, some political complications. Stories have been circulated from time to time of the reappearance of this priceless gem, but there seems to be nothing authentic after the date I name.

Should you feel disposed to furnish Mr Rosenbaum with the particulars you mention you possess, perhaps he may see his way to helping you in the matter of the expedition.

I am,
Yours very truly,
Abe. Critchett (Secretary).

"Now," went on Reuben, folding up the letter and returning it to his pocket, "this tickled my curiosity and I decided upon a risky move. In the pocket of the case I came across was a receipt from the cloak-room at Victoria for a bag. This I redeemed by sending a district messenger with the ticket. He was not suspected and the bag is now at my house at Brighton. The parchment was in it. That is why I think it is Cingalese, and that is what I want friend Herbert to tell us all about."

There was silence for a moment, then, "Queer game, treasure hunting," said Eddie.

"I know that, and I wouldn't touch it in the ordinary way of business, but Leah needs a holiday. Her doctor says she will benefit by a sea voyage, and so it's Ceylon for us—treasure or no treasure. If there *is* anything in this at all I'll take you and Herbert along

and see to the financing. It all depends what Herbert says. I'd like to make a bit out of the trip."

Eddie folded up the map carefully and passed it across to his companion. His eyes were aglow with the prospect before him. Travel was a mania with him, but travel with Leah! Romantic moonlit visions arose before him of nights on deck on the Indian Ocean with the beautiful Jewess. Eddie's love for Reuben's daughter had followed hot foot upon the admiration that seized him when he was first introduced to her on her return from the convent at Dijon eighteen months previously, but neither by look nor word did he dare betray it. He well knew that Reuben would not regard him as a son-in-law to be desired. Leah looked upon her father merely as a wealthy stockbroker and thought him the best of men, as indeed he was—to her. That any hint of his real life should reach her was his constant dread. Of all his friends in iniquity Eddie was the only one who was on visiting terms in private life with the Jew and his daughter. But then Eddie was discreet, and for his own sake he would have kept the truth from Leah at all costs.

All this was passing through his mind when he felt the cold eyes of the man opposite upon him. He rose and gave a little shiver.

"We'll have another bottle inside, Reuben, it's a little chilly," he said. "I'll dig Herbert up to-morrow."

. . . . . .

In a corner of the bar of the "Blue Dragon" in Fleet Street the Honourable Herbert Epgrave was pursuing his vocation. The Honourable Herbert's hat was on a chair beside him — a rather dilapidated soft felt hat. With a wicked-looking briar between his strong teeth the Honourable Herbert was writing an article which he hoped to sell to the *News* that evening. After that, work and the Honourable Herbert would be strangers for many a long day, until dire necessity brought them together again.

A strong, intellectual face had this scion of the noble house of Epgrave—a good-tempered face, but one that told only too plainly of mis-spent years.

A younger son, he had, like so many other younger sons, been intended for the Church, but the divinity students at the college,

together with a too liberal allowance, had made sad havoc of the Honourable Herbert and of the intentions of his august father, the Earl. And then a worse scrape than usual had resulted in the packing off of the Honourable Herbert to his father's plantations at Begumbo. There, after two years, the Earl paid him a surprise visit, with disastrous results to this younger son of the house of Epgrave. High words followed; events showed that the Honourable Herbert possessed a proud nature, and his father a dogged one. It was the beginning of the end. The homeward voyage from Ceylon in each other's company only served to widen the breach between them.

The Honourable Herbert did what others have done before him and chose the profession of letters. His articles were brilliant word-pictures and showed a deep insight into character, but he was unreliable, and it was a good-tempered, easy life he led among the nomads of the journalistic highway.

True, the Honourable Angela Epgrave made him an allowance of seventy-five pounds a year, paid weekly through her solicitor, but Wally needed a great deal of that.

The reader must know about Wally.

Some eighteen months before the date of this story Herbert had written a play, a trivial affair, but with a good central idea. The principal character was enacted by a clever but dissolute mummer, by name Wally Burns. His acting had made a small success of what would otherwise have been a decided failure, and Herbert was grateful and was not slow to show his appreciation.

Since that time Wally had attached himself to Herbert and Herbert's allowance with a tenacity that was at once the admiration and envy of all Maiden Lane.

It began by his asking Herbert to dinner at his rooms in the district of London where, in common with other stagey aspirants, he had his being. Congeniality was the order of the evening, and Herbert found it expedient to stay the night—and the next day. And so by easy stages it was worked, until now they shared the rooms permanently, Herbert paying the rent, an arrangement with which Wally was well pleased.

The habits of the Honourable Herbert were quite regular in their irregularity, and Eddie Dockerty had no difficulty in locating him.

Had it been a little later, he would have gone to the cheese stand in the Bedford Street Bodega with the same certainty of success that he felt when he pushed open the swing doors of the "Dragon."

The honourable member of the house of Epgrave looked up as Eddie entered, and hastily finished his tankard. The newcomer's hospitality was proverbial.

"Busy, 'Erbert?"

"Fair to middling, Eddie—what is it you want? A company prospectus or a speech to tindery shareholders? Or is it a little poem, Eddie? What?"

"No, I only want you to lunch with me."

The Honourable Herbert needed but that. He gathered up his scattered notes and papers and crammed them into his pocket. The *News* could wait for their article. A lunch with Eddie was a thing not to be despised and meant a prolonged period of appetite preparing and satisfying. In fact, a vista of unadulterated joy reaching at least until three o'clock opened out before the eyes of the Honourable Herbert.

"Right-oh, Eddie, but am I quite—well, I

haven't got my 'glad rags' on, you know; all my 'hurrah-clothing' is in the old place."

"We'll go somewhere quiet, 'Erby, and then I'll see to your getting them out. You're going on the 5.0 Pullman to Brighton with me."

"Anything to do with Aunt Angela? She lives at Brighton, you know—in a bath chair."

He was thinking of his allowance and what Wally would do if any untoward event endangered its payment.

"No, I'm just taking you down to a friend of mine. He's got something he wants you to see and get your opinion on—something about Ceylon I think it is. But never mind that now—gin and bitters?"

"Yes, Eddie, old man—koosh."

Then followed a good lunch and its accessories, and afterwards they were driven in a taxi to several pawnshops. It took them the best part of two hours to gather the Honourable's scattered wardrobe, but it was worth it.

It was a very different figure to that which Eddie met in the "Blue Dragon" who entered with him into the Pullman at London Bridge. The Honourable Herbert was him-

self again. A blue serge suit superbly cut quite recently by a confiding West-End tailor fitted his aristocratic figure to perfection. His linen was as gleaming as Eddie's own—in fact it *was* Eddie's own—and his cravat was fresh from the Burlington Arcade.

It was five minutes to the time of starting when Herbert called the attendant and wrote out a telegram.

Detained. Seven and sixpence in the left-hand vase—take it.—Herbert.

It was addressed to

"Wally Burns,
10 Ellaline Terrace,
Irving Crescent, Brixton."

And then he leant back and told Eddie he was entirely at his service for as long as he wanted him.

CHAPTER IV

LEAH WOOLF

"AND so you think there is something in it, Mr Epgrave?"

Woolf and Dockerty eyed their visitor anxiously and waited for his reply.

"It certainly seems like it," answered the Honourable Herbert, "and, curiously enough, you are not the first who has been to me on the very same affair. I know Ceylon like a native, you know."

His hearers looked up hastily; their eyes denoted their interest.

"Yes, a funny thing, isn't it? Only last month I had a letter from a fellow called Rosenbaum. I wrote him all I knew of the subject—*then*. I know more now. I tumbled across an old book at the Museum a few days back that told me a whole lot about the 'Moon of Valleys.'"

"And did you write to Rosenbaum?"

"I haven't yet, but I was going to. Now that I've seen you, Eddie, I'll hold what I know. This map is certainly *most* interesting."

He bent down eagerly to the chart, and there was silence for a few moments. Then he went on:

"At the same time this can't be in Ceylon itself. There are places here—Sinha-dam, for instance, and Jaffapura—that are quite new to me. This parchment may refer to a spot on one of the islands round that quarter—or even on the mainland itself. I'd better let you have a report written at length after a few days at the Museum. I know two or three books that will help me out."

The three men were sitting out on the little balcony of Steyne Lodge. Brighton had endured a day of intense glare, but with the setting of the sun a gentle breeze had come out of the south-west, and the parade below them was thronged with well-dressed people. The soft wind stirred into lazy motion the long lace curtains of the windows behind the men, and brought the music of the band on the West Pier to them in little gusts of melody.

As the curtains moved, one caught glimpses of a room in which a table was laid for dinner. An oak dresser crowded with blue china and pewter stood out strongly against the crimson wall-paper, and standing before it, arranging some tall blossoms in a vase, was Leah Woolf.

Perfectly adorable was Reuben's daughter —small, but of an exquisitely proportioned figure. Out of consideration for the Honourable Herbert they had not dressed for the evening, and Leah still wore an afternoon dress of sprig muslin with dainty Empire sash. Her hat, big with roses, had been thrown carelessly on a chair. Hair of the darkest brown was coiled simply around a superb little head in a compact and shapely mass. A trace of her Semitic origin could be traced only in her rather full and red lips. Her eyes, of a deep grey, she had inherited from her Christian mother.

The flowers arranged to her satisfaction, she parted the curtains and stood silhouetted against the ruby glow of the room.

"No, don't get up," as the men rose, "I'll sit here." Leah perched herself upon the arm of her father's wicker chair and swung one perfect little shoe to and fro idly. She

had met the Honourable Herbert only an hour before, but she liked him, and Eddie was an old friend. She glanced at the three faces.

"And what is the conversation of such terrible import, that it must cease when *I* come?" she said, laughing. "In other words —what were you talking about?"

Reuben Woolf reached up and stroked the hand that rested upon his shoulder.

"We're making up a party, dear, for that sea voyage Dr. Roper spoke about. Epgrave is going to show us the paradise of this world —Ceylon."

Leah jumped up and clapped her hands merrily.

"Ceylon—dad! I didn't expect more than the Canary Isles at the most. How perfectly heavenly! When? I shall dream of nothing but temples and sharks, and pagodas and junks, and pyramids and lamas, and dancing dervishes and rajahs, and boys that climb up ropes and disappear, and all those things until we're off. When *do* we start?"

"And you'd have the barbarity to drag your old father out of England before Doncaster? Leah, you're perfectly uncivilised."

"Dear old dad," Leah bent and kissed him, "I only wanted to show you how very, very glad I am. There's the gong—take me in, Mr Epgrave, and tell me what a jungle is like —and what dresses I had better take. Do we have to have a special costume for elephant riding?"

The meal was a pleasant one. The Honourable Herbert made most of the conversation by answering at length and with many an anecdote the string of questions fired at him by the excited girl. Eddie was singularly quiet. It was curious to watch the man when in Leah's company. To those who knew him for what he was it was easy to find an explanation — a feeling of shame. Leah's manner to him, as to everybody, was charming, and it seemed to Eddie as though he were getting her smiles by false pretences. It was strange that a man who had robbed his fellow-men of thousands and whose whole life was one huge false pretence should think this way. Perhaps his unspoken love for the beautiful little Jewess was the one pure spot in his warped nature, and one that in time might outweigh all the bad.

Reuben, too, had felt something of a like

shame when his nineteen-year daughter had come back from the convent at Dijon. But that was eighteen months back, and Reuben had long ago beaten down and outlived the impression. Leah had unconsciously been very near reforming him in those first few months of their reunion. But Reuben was made of hard material, and now his daughter, all unconsciously, had the opposite moral effect upon him.

He loved her devotedly, passionately, and he shook off his finer feelings as mere sentimentality. Leah should be rich, that was his one idea; it obsessed him; how those riches were acquired was a detail, anything coming in the way of procuring them had to be removed.

At dinner he told them the story of the jewel as he had first told it to Eddie, and Leah was in transports. An emerald big as an egg—and it was to be hers.

"There are a few books in the library that Mr Epgrave might take, dear—books on Ceylon and Southern India. I expect he knows them by heart, but he'd better have them with him. Go in with Leah, Epgrave, and choose them. They're on the bottom

shelf at the end. You must catch the 8.50, or there will be no Museum for you in the morning. It is best to strike when the iron is hot—what!"

Eddie and Woolf sat late after Herbert's departure for London, and it was past one o'clock when the latter suggested a 'doc and dorris.'

"By the way, there's one thing to be done," he said; "that bag that the chart was in—the one from Victoria cloak-room—was of rather a curious shape, and it's best out of the way in case of accidents. We'll take the motor-boat out a mile or two in the morning and drop it overboard. Where did I put the damn thing?" Reuben gave a rapid glance round the room, and then searched the hall—there was no bag.

He was returning to Eddie when a sweet voice came floating down from above.

"Are you *never* coming up, dad? What are you poking about for down there?"

"It's nothing, dear—only that brown bag that was here somewhere."

A little head with clouds of dark hair surrounding it popped for a moment over the rails of the landing.

"The little one with the two straps?"

"Yes. Where did you put it?"

"Oh, I gave that to Mr Epgrave, dad; he hadn't anything to carry the books from the library in. He's taken them to London in it."

Reuben pressed his lips together, hard. "It's of no consequence," he called up to his daughter, but to Eddie Dockerty he said something very different.

. . . . .

It was nearly eleven when the Honourable Herbert reached Ellaline Terrace and let himself in at No. 10. The first floor, like the staircase, was in darkness, but a light shone from under the door of the room he shared with Wally Burns.

The Thespian had gone to bed, that is, he had retired. Propped up in his little camp bedstead, and covered by a barbaric patchwork quilt, he was reading the *Era*. The light that had shone under the door came from a candle stuck in its own grease upon the bottom of an inverted soap-dish, the cup of which was fitted over Wally's knee. In a large jug with a broken spout, within reach, was a pint or more of stout.

He had received Herbert's wire, but had been unable to trace the treasure of the vase therein mentioned, and financial depression had driven the actor to bed at an abnormally early hour, so that he was inclined to resent the golden time that his friend had in all probability spent. He heard the clink of money in Herbert's pocket as the latter flung his coat down, and he glanced hurriedly at the little American clock that was ticking noisily on the mantelpiece. The hands pointed to eleven, and Wally prepared to rise. There was yet an hour and a half allowed by a generous Government before the evening need be written off as a *complete* failure.

"We'll just walk to the corner, 'erbert, and have a little tonic. I'm sick of Ma Pinnitt's stout—I believe she waters it."

Herbert gave a good-tempered sigh, and Wally, having tumbled into some clothes, led the way downstairs again.

It was not far to the Round of Beef Hotel, but it took long enough to walk for Herbert to hint at his momentous news.

"Wally, I think I'm going to India."

"Ah! I'd love to be a Rajah," was Wally's reply, which plainly denoted that he thought

his friend was joking. The next words made him think otherwise.

"Do be serious, Wally—you see what it means—we part company."

The actor did not reply, but pushed open the glass doors of the saloon bar and made his way over to a corner settee.

"Brandy—'erbert, my boy—neat, and then we'll talk about it."

Whilst Herbert was at the bar, Wally stared blankly before him, and into his eyes crept the dull light of a dawning terror. Without Herbert's help the rooms at Ellaline Terrace must be given up or he must—*work*. It had ever been his proud boast that he would do anything in reason except that, and now labour in all its grim earnestness faced him. It was horrible.

Herbert watched him drink the fiery liquid—watched the trembling hand, the dazed eye. Then he smiled and patted him on the back. He had quite an affection for the little man.

"Why—Wally—think I would leave you in the lurch?—not me. We'll go to Bradshaw if it's settled that I go, and tell him you are to draw old Angela's little bit each week—I won't need it."

Slowly Wally's eyes came round to Herbert's face.

"Honest injun?" he said.

The vision of work in all its terrors faded and gave place to brighter pictures—afternoons of elegant ease in Maiden Lane, preceded by mornings in bed and followed by evenings of delight.

He grasped his friend's hand and nearly burst into tears—the strain had been very great. He wanted to ask when Herbert intended to start, but somehow he did not think it would be quite good form. After all, Wally was not *all* bad.

An hour later, when the actor was snoring the sleep of contentment, Herbert sat on the edge of his own little bed and thought of Leah Woolf. On the floor at his feet was a well-worn leather trunk, covered with labels that spoke eloquently of the travels of his former life.

He had dragged it from its corner, where for months it had played the part of a soiled linen receptacle. His eyes roved over the half-obliterated and stained labels till he found what he sought. It was almost illegible, and he had to bend down to read "Grand

Oriental Hotel, Colombo." Then he nodded sagely at the trunk.

"Never thought we'd go back there, did we, old pal? We've been out of it lately. We've both accumulated a lot of dirty linen, haven't we?"

And then the Honourable Herbert Epgrave went to bed, with the firm conviction in his mind that his 'wasting' days were over.

CHAPTER V

"MOON OF VALLEYS"

THE days immediately following the return of the Honourable Herbert to Brixton were spent by Wally in anticipatory fashion, that is to say, he made the most of his improved prospects amongst those of his acquaintances in Maiden Lane and the kindred thoroughfares who were still open to the gentle art of 'touching.'

It was not so with the Honourable Herbert. All the available hours of the first three days found him beneath the dome of the Museum reading-room—buried deeply in goodly tomes dealing with Ceylon and the lore of the East.

And then he had a lapse.

It was on the fourth day that his evil star prompted him, for his sins, to enter an adjacent hotel for his lunch, which he usually took temperately at a little café in the Tottenham Court Road. In the bar he met a friend

of long standing and the lapse lasted for two days, and when, on the following Monday, Herbert took his accustomed place at K.11, he had lost his grip, as it were, on the lore of the East. Also, for the first time in his life, he felt really ashamed of himself.

Thus it was that Reuben and Eddie spent the Brighton race week in an anxious frame of mind, but at last the looked-for word came —and very satisfactory they found it. They read it together on the little balcony of Steyne Lodge.

Report of Herbert Epgrave on "The Moon of Valleys" and its connection (if any) with the chart in the possession of Reuben Woolf, Esquire, of Brighton, Sussex.

The Chart, as I imagined, does not refer to any spot upon Ceylon itself, but deals undoubtedly with the island of Paran. This is a small possession of the Dutch, situated out of the usual run of the steamers that touch at the larger island or the mainland. It is of little value to its owners; in fact, they trouble only about the coast country, which is rich in the production of rice, tea, and cocoa. They have tried to conquer the real ruler of the place,

but hitherto have found the game not worth the candle. He is called Rajah Sinha and is a descendant of the traitor Pilima Talawa, who was executed by King Wickrama of Kandy about 1815. *This genial monarch treated all the relations of Pilima in a shocking manner, having a pretty taste in tortures. One only, a nephew, escaped, and, collecting a following, defeated the Rajah of Paran and took up an almost impregnable position in the centre of his island. The "Moon of Valleys," which was undoubtedly in the possession of the old Rajah about this time, disappeared.*

The previous history of the stone is brief. It was first heard of when Nadir Shah, the Persian invader of India, seized it from the Mogul Emperors. In the subsequent mutiny, in which the Persian was murdered, the stone fell into the hands of his troops, and was lost sight of until an Afghan soldier offered it, together with numerous other fine jewels, to an Armenian merchant at Bussorah, named Shaffrass. The Armenian and his brother bought "The Moon," after which Shaffrass killed his co-owner and fled to Ceylon, where he sold the gem to a Buddhist priest in Kandy and was then murdered in his turn, only in his case his death was embellished with trimmings, as it were.

Now the chart clearly refers to the country ruled by Pilima's descendant, Rajah Sinha. The capital, Talabo, is as near as possible in the centre of the island and is built in a cup-like depression surrounded by mountains, through which the passes are few and dangerous. This is evidently the place spelt Tyalbo on the map.

The marginal notes on the parchment make it obvious that the stone was hidden. Whether the present Rajah knows of it and of the hiding-place is a question, as also is how it came to England and into the hands of the man you had it of.

Personally I am inclined to the belief that this man must be the anglicised descendant of one of the court officers who had deserted his troublous country for the quiet of England. Possibly he has no idea of the true value of the chart, and it seems clear that whoever finds "The Moon" may honestly keep it.

(Signed) Herbert Prudames Epgrave.

Reuben Woolf leant back in his chair and lit the cigar that had gone out.

"Herbert was the man we wanted—what! —he seems to have got the hang of the thing. I was dead set on going, anyway, but this clinches it. I've got this house for another

month—after that"—he waved his hands out to sea—"Come, let's go in and tell the girl."

. . . . .

A few weeks later the Honourable Herbert Epgrave was giving a farewell supper to his dear friend Wally Burns, who was bravely doing his best to restrain his joy at his host's impending departure. Everything had been most satisfactorily arranged from the point of view of the little actor. Only that morning they had been to Bedford Row and interviewed the solicitor who had the distributing of Aunt Angela's bounty.

Mr Bradshaw, the sedate old family solicitor in that street of law, told Herbert that he didn't like his friend, but, there—he had spread out his hands, and, "I take no responsibility," he had said; "your money is your own, Mr Epgrave."

Herbert's rather curt answer, "and so is my business, Mr Bradshaw," had closed the interview, leaving the actor in the undisputed possession of thirty shillings a week until the Honourable saw fit to return and claim it.

Wally did not envy him his journey in the least. The Strand was good enough for him,

but Herbert was aglow with the excitement of travel.

"By the way, Wally," he said at parting, "I'm staying the night with Mr Dockerty—one of the men I'm going with—and I want you to bring that little bag I brought the books up in from Brighton with me—you know, the one with the two straps. Woolf particularly wants it. Bring it down to the dock in the morning, there's a good chap. Woolf seemed very particular about it."

And Wally promised.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN FROM THE EAST

IN spite of the genial autumn sunshine that flooded the quayside where the giant steamer quivered with approaching departure, the little dark-skinned man who was pacing to and fro in the vicinity of the gangway wore his overcoat buttoned up to his chin. As he walked he cast his fine dark eyes from side to side with the subdued keenness of the experienced watcher. The hand baggage of the passengers seemed to claim his special attention.

He had seen Reuben Woolf and his gay little party embark, but he had given them no more than a casual glance. He had seen them again leaning over the rail as the vessel detached herself from her moorings, but beyond noticing that the young lady with them was very beautiful, the party conveyed nothing to him.

He watched the *Ramayana* sidle warily out into the haze that hung over the middle of the river, its bulwarks lined with waving handkerchiefs, then he turned with an expressive gesture and made his way through the crowd that thronged the dock side. It was then that he ran into Wally.

As the black eyes of the Cingalese fell upon the handbag that the little actor was carrying, he started violently, then, pulling himself together with an effort, he passed on, but not for far. A stack of boiler plates, red with rust, stood near him, and stealthily he slipped behind them.

He had not long to wait. There was only one way out from the dock, and in a few moments Wally reappeared whistling jauntily, the brown leather bag with two straps swinging carelessly from his left hand. He was sorry, more for the fruitless journey that had dragged him from his beloved Strand on this sunny morning than for Herbert's sake. It was Epgrave's own fault and that of the supper he had so lavishly provided the night before that had made him oversleep himself, and he did not intend to spoil his glorious vista by any absurd regrets. And so he

whistled as he walked, and swung the brown bag with the two straps. The true significance of this article as an awkward piece of evidence, being totally unknown to him, caused him no uneasiness.

As Wally made his way back to the main road he little dreamt that he had a follower. When he boarded the motor-'bus that was proceeding Citywards he took no account of the little dark-skinned man who sat a few seats behind him, and when, at last, he was safely and comfortably *set* in his favourite corner at Rule's the presence of the stranger at the next table meant nothing to him. His whole mind was taken up with the improved conditions of his existence.

He sat in supreme contentment and reached out his hand for the whisky and soda that Harry, the silent-footed waiter, had just placed before him ; his thoughts were of the pleasantest. He glanced at the clock—ah ! some of his lady friends would be in shortly, and then——" I *beg* your pardon."

It was the dark-skinned stranger who spoke. He had risen hurriedly, and taking advantage of Wally's inspection of the clock, had tipped over the whisky and soda.

The little actor looked up with some show of resentment, but the manner of the man before him disarmed him. He was bowing courteously, his hand over his heart, and was still pouring out his apologies in a pleasant voice and in most perfect English. He reached out a slender brown hand, on which gleamed a splendid ruby, to the bell.

"—— *most* careless of me; it was my coat —you must really allow me to replenish your glass—no, I'll take no denial."

Wally had not the slightest intention of giving him one, and he accepted the new drink with a good grace. In the exuberance of his new-found wealth he felt kindly to all men. Over their whisky the acquaintance ripened, and an invitation to lunch met with the Thespian's unqualified approval.

He told people long afterwards that he perfectly remembered getting into a taxi-cab with the Cingalese and lighting a cigar that his new friend gave him. The last thing that he could call to mind was the curiously barbaric silver cigar case.

. . . . .

—— and the folding doors that were of pure gold—curiously barbaric—opened with a

sounding clang, and there entered a gigantic Indian, exactly like the curry cook at the "Grecian," but three times the size. He was gorgeously apparelled and was riding on a two-headed elephant that waved his two trunks about sinuously. At the end of one was the Honourable Herbert in a pink yachting cap, on the other the silent-footed waiter at Rule's. They were singing "The Rajah of Bong" as they waved to and fro. The face of the huge Indian was a mask of ferocity as he aimed horrid blows at them with a scimitar that flashed evilly as it slashed——

Wally sat up and rubbed his knuckles into his eyes. "Nightmare," he said; "it's all that damn talk about India with Herbert—that, and the lobster—Good lord!"

The latter exclamation was wrung from his lips as he took in his surroundings. This wasn't Ellaline Terrace—not a bit like it.

For the space of three minutes he sat there, gazing blankly before him with dull and aching eyes, then in a flash his doings of the morning returned to him in full and significant force, and a heart-clutching fear took him as his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light of the room.

He was in a small and dirty apartment that reeked abominably with some sweet and pungent odour. It was furnished in a meagre way with a few essentials, but there was a vague air of unreality over everything. Dingy hangings of an Oriental garishness—quaint ornaments of undoubted Eastern origin—a leering idol, chipped and broken, and over all that choking smell that reminded Wally of the paper that hawkers burn and thrust into the nostrils of unoffending pedestrians on Ludgate Hill.

A slight steam rising from a dish on the rickety table drew his attention. It must have been the smell of the filthy curry concoction that it contained that had prompted his dream about the cook.

Painfully he rose to his feet and tottered weakly to the window. The walls of his brain seemed falling apart, and he groaned as much in physical as in mental torture.

He parted the gaudy shawl that did duty for a curtain and gazed through the grimy glass. It was a depressing vista. Around him were nothing but chimney pots—great gaunt stacks of them that reached as far as he could see in the dusk of the falling night. He

was high up—very high up. Through a broken pane came snatches of "The Merry Widow" Waltz played on a street organ. Cries of children at play far below him mingled with the incessant but distant whir of traffic that denoted some busy thoroughfare.

Wally was too dazed to think clearly. It all seemed part and parcel of his nightmare, and he half expected to see the two-headed elephant dancing a stately measure between the chimney stacks.

And then, gradually, it came to him that he was in reality awake, and action seemed to him a necessary thing. Barely thinking what he was doing he seized the dish of curry and flung it with all his might through a pane of the window. He heard it rattle on a roof—then crash into the street below.

Then he braced himself to listen.

CHAPTER VII

WALLY BURNS PREPARES FOR A NEW RÔLE

THE first result of his action was the sudden cessation of sound among the children at play. Wally could picture the group of grimy little faces staring up at the sky. Then the babel broke out afresh as each childish voice gave its opinion on the unusual incident. A street door far below him opened and shut, followed by an indefinite sound that resolved itself, as it came nearer, into shuffling footsteps.

Wally turned and faced the door, picking up a small but serviceably heavy ornament as he did so. The room seemed to have grown perceptibly darker since he had risen from the mattress, and he could only just discern the old curtain that hung over the door. The footsteps came nearer, a key rattled in the lock, and the door slowly

opened, and an old man evidently of Indian extraction peeped cautiously in. He held up a candle, the light from which fell full upon his copper-coloured skin and long, patriarchal beard.

"What you make so dam row for?"

It may have been a perfectly natural question from the old fellow's point of view, but to the little actor it seemed rather terse and uncivil, and it annoyed him excessively.

He drew himself up in a stagey attitude and demanded, after what he intended should be an ominous pause, the meaning of 'this outrage.'

The old Indian advanced slowly into the room, making way for another figure that had ascended the stairs behind him. Wally at once recognised the wiry little frame and gleaming black eyes of his friend of the morning. The Cingalese was bowing ironically.

"I am sorry—deeply sorry that you should look upon my hospitality as an outrage, Mr Burns; you were taken very ill and I brought you——"

"I was drugged," broke in Wally fiercely. "Your infernal cigar——"

"Ah! the cigar—exactly. I had forgotten

that. It is an Indian brand, and perhaps rather strong for those who are not used to them—eh, Agra ? "

The aged man from the East seemed to think the jest a merry one, for he grinned evilly, and his companion went on :

" And now you are here, Mr Burns, I want you to listen to a little story ; it will not take very long. Won't you sit down ? "

Wally would have much preferred to remain standing in the Napoleonic attitude he had adopted near the window, but the coolness of the men opposite him was fast sapping the small amount of nerve he possessed. His legs, too, felt weak and hardly able to support his aching head and body. He chose an old Windsor chair and sat heavily down.

" Won't you smoke—Oh ! this one's all right."

Wally pushed aside the proffered case, the curiously barbaric one he remembered so well, and shook his head. The Cingalese cleared his throat with a little cough.

" My name, Mr Burns, is Chunder. My great-grandfather held the post of painter at the court of King Wickrama. This potentate, towards the end of his reign, became embroiled

in the incessant warfare with the Portuguese and the Dutch which preceded the British rule in Ceylon. The particular incidents that led to my ancestor deserting his country are of no interest to you ; the main fact is that he arrived in England, a wealthy man, somewhere about the time of the battle of Waterloo. Among his most treasured possessions was a small map or chart on thin parchment —the key to the hiding-place of a remarkable emerald called in Indian history 'Moon of Valleys.' It was my great-grandfather's original intention to return when his country had quieted down, but the peaceful life of England took a firm hold on him. He married a French lady, the widow of one of their officers who died a prisoner of war, and settled down in Devonshire on a small estate he had purchased. I'm not boring you, am I ?"

Wally shook his head. "I don't see what all this has to do with——"

"But you will soon, Mr Burns. Well, my great-grandfather in due course joined the great majority and my grandfather inherited the estate and the chart. But he was rather a lazy man, and the ample means at his disposal made him loth to fly into what might

prove an exceedingly dangerous enterprise. Also, I believe, he had some little doubt as to the authenticity of the chart. Be that as it may, he took no steps, and in the early 'eighties my father, in his turn, came into possession.

"He was a man of an entirely different stamp, and the danger that had held my grandfather back from the venture had entirely the opposite effect upon him. Circumstances arose, however, that prevented him embarking on the quest of the 'Moon' until 'ninety-two, when he sailed for Ceylon on the *Mahratta*. From time to time I received letters from him until, at last, one came telling me that he had located the hiding-place of the jewel and expected to set sail for the spot in a few days.

"Months passed, and my next communication told a sad tale. A packet arrived from the Dutch Resident at Sinha-dam. The body of a murdered man had been found in a lonely paddy field some distance from the coast. His identity had been traced, and his possessions in his room at his hotel were being forwarded to me. His papers, amongst which was the chart, the Resident himself sent on

to me by registered post together with a courteous little note of sympathy. Good of him, wasn't it ? "

Wally maintained a scornful silence.

" Until a few weeks ago that chart was in my possession. A few weeks back I left it with other things in a bag in the cloak-room at Victoria Station. The same day my pocket-book containing the voucher was stolen from me and the bag redeemed. It was a bag of rather a curious shape, and you were carrying it, Mr Burns, when I so fortunately met you this morning—the chart is no longer in it. Where is it ? "

At last Wally understood the drift of the history the Cingalese was relating to him, but he had no answer to make. His better nature, such as it was, told him that Herbert —dear old Herbert—could not be the thief. But then he undoubtedly had been in possession of the bag and, moreover, was on his way to Ceylon. Of Dockerty and Woolf, Wally knew nothing, hardly their names. Epgrave had mentioned them only as the friends with whom he was travelling. If Herbert had really stolen the bag, it was plainly Wally's duty to——

"I'm waiting."

Still Wally made no reply, and the Cingalese resumed:

"You'd better make a clean breast of it. You'll remain here until you do. This house belongs to Mr Agra here, and is perfectly safe for *any purpose*. Good lord, our patience has been tried enough. For weeks past we have watched the Ceylon steamers embark their passengers, knowing that sooner or later the thief would take the journey. You are the first thread of the story that has come into our hands, and we don't intend to let go."

Wally Burns was entirely selfish, and it did not take him many moments to decide upon which side his bread was buttered. He even tried to tell his craven conscience that it was his bounden duty to expose roguery; besides, he was anxious to get back to the Strand.

Briefly he told the whole story as he knew it, which was little enough. He spoke of Herbert's return from Brighton with the bag and of his subsequent hurried departure for the East with his friends, two men and a young girl.

The Cingalese listened attentively and had a fleeting memory of such a party standing

by the taffrail of the *Ramayana*. Wally finished his recital with a whining declaration of his own innocence. The Cingalese rose to his feet and came over to him. He appeared to be friendly.

"I think, on the whole, Mr Burns, that I believe your story. We must start at once."

"*We?*" The little actor's eyes opened at this.

"Yes—I think I'll take you with me."

The Cingalese spoke thoughtfully. It was clear that he did not consider Wally's wishes in the matter at all.

"But—but—they'll know me."

Mr Chunder waived the objection aside.

"Oh, no, they won't. Old Agra here will disguise you all right. We'll pass as two Anglo-Cingalese going out to our plantations. I've never been to Ceylon in my life, and don't know a word of their language. I'm English as you are, all but my looks. A little dye that our old friend knows of will fix you up. You see, I don't care about leaving you behind. You'll be useful in a lot of ways. Now, we'll go out to dinner."

Wally protested against the part he was called on to play, but it was all in vain, and

the financial prospects held out to him as the two men led the way downstairs were so rosy that he knew his game was to make a virtue of necessity and meet his new friend in every way possible.

As for Herbert—pooh—why should he consider him—a vulgar luggage-lifter? Really, Wally felt quite virtuous.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ERRAND OF JUSTICE

THE streets through which his new companion conducted him were quite unknown to Wally — dull, sordid rows of tall warehouses and large wall spaces, between which he caught glimpses of little forests of masts and spars. The murky evening air was redolent with the heterogeneous odours of the river-side, which had anything but a salutary effect upon Wally's already splitting head. He was heartily glad when they left the narrow by-ways for a broader thoroughfare, and still more glad when he saw the Cingalese raise his umbrella in signal to a passing taxi-cab.

Mr Chunder was the first to break the silence when they had taken their seats and were being whirled merrily westward.

"Perhaps you would not think it, Mr Burns, but I am a man of peace, delicately

brought up, and one utterly averse to forceful methods. Believe me, you are the first man I have ever drugged in my life."

Wally surlily acknowledged the doubtful distinction.

The other laughed. "Oh, I don't mean *that* quite. I don't expect you to appreciate the honour, but really, when you look at it, what else could I do? If I had spoken to you when we sat in Rule's you would have very naturally resented it, and there would have been a scene, in which I, as a stranger, would probably have been worsted. Honestly, it was the only way."

Wally's reply was a dubious grunt. Although he had fully made up his mind to throw in his lot with the man beside him, he still felt, both morally and physically, the effects of his treatment, and he did not intend that he should make himself cheap by appearing to be too ready to bury his resentment.

It was not until they were well through an excellent dinner in a corner of the "Trocadero" grill-room that the subject in its financial bearings was touched on.

Chunder filled up Wally's glass.

"You must know, Mr Burns, that although I am a man of means now, and well able to see this thing through, it is only lately that I can say so. I have approached half the financiers in the City to help me, but the answer has always been the same. They all want fuller particulars than I am prepared to trust them with. And so I have waited. Instead of your being 'ratty' at the little inconvenience you have been put to, you should think yourself lucky to be my partner, as it were, in the enterprise. You will be paid the equivalent of five pounds a week, and all your expenses will be my affair. I further intend to deposit the sum of two hundred pounds for you here in London in case our venture is a failure. If we succeed, of course you can look upon yourself as made for life. Have you any friends, any one with whom I can leave the money?"

A vision, with a Strand background, of many friends passed before Wally's eyes. He imagined that they looked at him imploringly. They would all be glad to assist dear Wally in the matter, but—ah—Mr Bradshaw—the very man. Wally already looked upon him as his family solicitor, and

he mentioned him to Chunder by that apellation with a certain amount of pride.

"Good; then we'll meet at the corner of Bedford Row at nine-thirty to-morrow morning. I'll hand you the money, but he had better not see me. If he knows where Herbert's gone he might put two and two together. These lawyer Johnnies are rather smart at times. I think you had better leave it in the Safe Deposit in Chancery Lane."

"When do we go?"

"We'll leave to-morrow evening from Charing Cross and take the P.L.M. direct through to Marseilles, where we'll wait for the *Ramayana* and join her there. Agra will see to your make-up during the day. There are certain to be a good many Anglo-Cingalese on board and we won't be noticed. Good night. We'll make it the corner of Chancery Lane instead of Bedford Row, at half-past nine."

Ill as he still felt, Wally could not resist the jingle of good red gold in his pocket. It spoke to him plainly of various haunts, to the inside of which he would be a stranger after to-night. He paid a hurried visit to Ellaline Terrace, where he took a touching farewell of

Ma Pinnitt. Then ensued a good little meal and a last saunter round the promenade of the "Empire." He did himself well, and it was with a head that still ached abominably that he kept the appointment with Chunder the following morning.

After the money matter was satisfactorily arranged, the pair made their way to the little house by the docks. Even Wally, versed as he was in the art of the make-up box, was surprised at the absurd simplicity with which the aged Agra transformed him into an anglicised native of Ceylon. A preparation rubbed into the skin gave him the coffee-berry colour peculiar to the Cingalese. The old Indian added deft touches, with a tiny camel's-hair brush, of some acid that gave an exact representation of freckles, and which were well calculated to put any one who had the least suspicion of Wally's identity off the scent at once. His straight and somewhat scanty hair was dyed a glossy blue-black, and a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles with circular glasses, slightly smoked and fitted with side pieces, served to hide the eyes, which were of rather too light a brown for the part they were called upon to play.

His attire was composed of a black alpaca jacket fastened close up to the throat, white duck trousers, and brown shoes of a tapering, foreign shape, and a perfectly round smoking-cap of the same material as the jacket. It was also pointed out to him that your true Cingalese was seldom seen without an umbrella.

In fact, as Wally surveyed himself in the mirror that Agra held out to him, he came to the conclusion that it was a very creditable piece of work indeed. As Chunder assured him, he looked more like the real article than he did himself.

During the afternoon the two men paid experimental visits to places where Wally was well known. At not one of them was he recognised. The silent-footed waiter at Rule's certainly stared at them, but it was only a stare of curiosity. At Charing Cross they found a couple of steamer trunks awaiting them in charge of old Agra. They were packed with all the necessaries for their journey, and as Wally leant back in the corner of the first-class smoker, he felt that he wasn't doing so badly. He was an actor at heart, and the idea of the disguise, carrying as it

did with it no inconveniences, rather appealed to him than otherwise. His conscience was clear—he had quite convinced himself that this was an errand of justice.

Chunder drew out a pocket flask. "To the success of our undertaking," he said, "and to 'Moon of Valleys.'"

. . . . .

At the moment when the two men were drinking, the good ship *Ramayana* was cutting her way through the Biscay waters. In a well-appointed deck-cabin two men were discussing a bottle of wine and a book dealing with the Dutch possessions in the Indian Ocean. On the upper deck Leah Woolf lay amid the rugs and cushions of her deck-chair listening with shining eyes to the romance of the East as narrated by the man who was leaning tenderly towards her.

The moon shone on the water, making a pathway of silver from the ship to the horizon. The Honourable Herbert Epgrave had never talked better in his life.

CHAPTER IX

ON BOARD THE *RAMAYANA*

IT had been plain from the time that the *Ramayana* left her dock that the Honourable had been very badly hit indeed. Reuben saw it and preferred that things should take their course. Leah would be rich, and he, with his knowledge of men, could see that Herbert's faults were only skin deep and rather the sins of omission than those of inherent wickedness. Besides, when the old Earl should, in the fullness of time, join his ancestors in the mausoleum of the chapel at Epgrave, no animosity in the world could keep his only surviving son from the title and estates. Yes, Reuben felt inclined to let things alone; he knew he was quite competent to deal with them did occasion arise to do so.

Eddie lived through the voyage in a condition of subdued rage. Deep down in his heart he knew that a very radical change would have to take place in him before he

could think of Leah as a wife, and of that change he could, as yet, detect no sign. Many a time, as he sat idly in his deck-chair watching the changing ocean, he made resolutions, but so surely as he made them, the same evening would find him with Reuben poring over the chart and bridging their rivers of difficulties with suggestions of abounding villainy.

The Mediterranean and the Canal had long been left behind, and the ship was making a splendid passage. There had been a large body of overlanders to board the *Ramayana* at Marseilles, and there was nothing in the appearance of a certain pair of small Cingalese gentlemen to claim special attention.

It was a scorching morning on the upper deck; the voyage was all but over, and Eddie and Reuben were leisurely playing an uninteresting game of quoits. They turned from time to time to exchange a word with Leah and Herbert, who, lying in their deck-chairs, watched the game idly. The subject of the Emerald was by mutual consent taboo, except in the privacy of their cabins. To the casual observer the party was a very ordinary one of pleasure.

To the casual observer—yes, but not to the keen eyes of Mr Chunder, who, leaning against the rail, watched the quoit playing, and incidentally the players. Reuben raised his eyes, and the Cingalese turned away abruptly and walked off. He appeared to be quite unconcerned, but Reuben's lips tightened and he seemed to lose all further interest in the game.

He threw his quoit down, and turning to Eddie suggested something cooling in his cabin. Dockerty at once saw that his friend had something on his mind and wished to speak to him alone. He muttered some excuse and followed the elder man to his private state-room.

Reuben closed the door and slipped the little bolt. "There are too many of these bally niggers on board to suit me," he said, "they're getting on my nerves."

"There always are a lot on this line," answered Eddie. "Tea and coffee-planters mostly."

"Oh, I don't expect they know our game. I don't mean that, but it doesn't do to take risks in our business. You see, we couldn't bind Herbert down to secrecy too strongly

or he'd have smelt a rat. Leah, too. When a secret has four holders it is never safe. I wish we had Charlie Kenter here."

"What on earth for?"

"I'd like him to see that little 'nosey parker' who was watching our game just now. If I could be sure that he is *not* the man that Charlie lifted the case off, I'd feel a darn sight easier in my mind."

He paused a moment, then with a glance at the door, and round the room, drew the chart from his pocket.

"It's safer with you, Eddie," he said, handing it across to him. "Your six foot of muscle is better protection than I can give it. Hide it well, Eddie. I'm not at all easy. Let's go on deck."

At seven o'clock the next morning Eddie was revelling in his bath with a keen enjoyment. The night had been hot and sultry and the sea high enough to make an open porthole an impossibility, and he felt loth to leave the limpid and cool water. The bathroom was only a few yards from his cabin, and, wrapped in a Turkish robe, he was generally the first on board to avail himself of it.

This morning, just as he was about to return to his cabin, he was surprised to hear a hammering at the door and to see Reuben enter the room.

Now, Eddie knew that the little Jew was not partial to baths, and he looked his surprise.

Reuben was the first to speak.

"What is it, Eddie?"

"What's what?"

"You sent for me; they told me you wanted me at once—here."

As he spoke, from the corridor outside the bathroom came a muffled clang—then silence.

Into Eddie's face shone a grim look of understanding, and in a moment he had dashed open the door and was out in the corridor. He pulled up suddenly with a curse. "I knew it," he said.

Some one had managed, whilst Reuben was with Eddie, to close the iron doors, used only in case of panic, and the two men were prisoners in the bulkhead thus isolated. Reuben was white to the lips. "The chart!" he breathed thickly.

"In my cabin," said Eddie shortly.

Together they rained blow after blow on

the stout iron obstacle, but the stewards were busy attending to the awakening passengers, and it was some twenty minutes before they were liberated.

They flew to Eddie's cabin; the lock had been forced and the door stood ajar.

On all sides were the evidences of a hurried search. Eddie's clothes, which he had left neatly folded, were strewn on the floor. Lockers had been forced and the carpets disturbed. Eddie gave a glance round, then sat on the edge of his bunk, from which the bedclothes had been stripped, and laughed softly. Reuben stared at him in astonishment and anger.

"Gone, eh! The whole scheme ruined by your damned cleanliness — whoever wants a bath every morning? Don't sit there grinning like an ape—say something."

"You were right, Reuben—they're evidently after us."

"*After* us—good lord! they've *got* us, seems to me. I'll have the captain on to this and have that infernal little black put in irons. I'll see if I——"

Eddie held up his hand.

"Now, Reuben, don't be silly. I'm glad

this has happened; it lets us know what to expect."

As he spoke he rose and approached the head of the bunk. There was a small roller-blind arranged here to protect the sleeper from the light of the porthole without drawing the curtains of the latter. This enabled the occupant of the cabin to enjoy the fresh air without the disturbing glare of the tropical sun on the water.

Reuben watched with a smile that grew broader and broader as Eddie pulled down the little blind. Rolled up in its folds was the parchment.

"You're a wonder!" he said admiringly.

"Thanks. I didn't think they would ever dream of looking there. I roll it up here every night when I go to bed, it's safer than under the pillow—everybody looks under pillows. In the daytime I have it with me. Now, Reuben, we'll go to work quietly and find out the galoot who shut that iron door."

Reuben, who was already dressed, waited while Eddie got into his suit of white ducks, and together they proceeded up on deck. They searched diligently for the little dark-skinned men without success. During their

quest land was sighted, and for the moment the Cingalese were put out of their minds.

On the horizon a low strip of what appeared to be vapour was slowly resolving itself into a palm-fringed coast, behind which showed the grey-green of distant hills.

Leah and Herbert came running up, and the girl placed a little hand on Eddie's arm.

"Isn't it too heavenly, Mr Dockerty? It's like a great green jewel, isn't it? It's like my emer—— What's the matter, father?" For Reuben had caught sight of Mr Chunder near them, and his grasp on his daughter's arm as he led her away was somewhat rough.

On the face of the Cingalese shone satisfaction.

"Did you hear that, Mr Burns—*her* emerald, indeed! Your thieving friend Herbert is very generous with my property, don't you think?"

CHAPTER X

MUTTU

ONE effect of the incident of the disarranged cabin was to decide Reuben to hurry forward with his programme. There was now no manner of doubt but that they were not alone in their quest, and that the existence of the chart on board was a secret no longer. The knowledge caused the old rascal to summon up all the energy and cunning of which he was possessed.

From their window at the Grand Oriental Hotel they commanded a wide view of the harbour and of the quay side, and they watched intently for signs of the Cingalese gentleman whom they suspected of the outrage on board the *Ramayana*. He and his little friend had apparently disappeared.

Immediately on their arrival Herbert had departed on a two days' ride to Begumbo, where he had spent some time, years ago, on

his father's plantation. It was in search of the old foreman, Muttu, that Herbert took the journey, hoping to gather from the old man a few particulars that might aid them in their quest.

He had kindly recollections of Muttu, whose loyalty to the father had not been able to prevent his affection for the high-spirited lad that Herbert had been in those days. He knew that he could safely trust the old servant with particulars of the matter in hand. Memories of many an escapade in which the ancient foreman had played a part came back to him as he rode through the gorgeous country. A long road of red sand wound before him fringed on either side with vegetation of the intensest green. It had not changed since he had ridden this way some six years back. How well he remembered each turn of its winding way—the mountains rising in terraces, richly patched with forest and vivid with the scarlet hibiscus, the scented fields of cinnamon, the banana groves, and the livid green of the rice swamps.

The Honourable Herbert dismounted to spend the night on the site of an ancient city, centuries in ruin, a spot he had often used

for the same purpose in past years on his trips to and from the coast. Not a stone had changed. There was the same cosy little alcove between the carved pillars, that he had so often slept in, with no roof but the stars. A monkey scampered chattering across the paved courtyard, and Herbert hailed him as he would an old friend.

He sat upon an overturned pillar and gave himself up to the romance and the delicate beauty of the scene. As he gazed up at the rows of stately columns that formed a noble colonnade before him, he found it hard to believe that the last six years had had any existence ; the thought of the " Blue Dragon" and Ma Pinnitt came as a physical shock to him. The moonlight flowed serenely through the narrow windows in the crumbling walls ; it strengthened their frescoes and carvings and cast inky shadows on the rank tangle of weeds and cactus at his feet. On the sill of one of these windows sat his friend the monkey ; his head was dropped at a comical angle, and Herbert could see his little eyes gleaming wickedly down upon him. A peacock screamed far back in the jungle.

The smoke from Herbert's pipe rose in a

thin spiral and he let his mind wander where it would, until it rested upon the mental figure of Leah Woolf. What a fool he had been these past few years, how he had thrown them away! He wished that his father could appear before him now and receive his regrets. What a good chap the old Earl was. Six years of a bad, unhealthy dream—thank heaven, it was over!

He took from his pocket his flask, and for a moment had thoughts of pouring out its contents at his feet. Then he laughed—no, that would be simply foolishly dramatic. He put it instead to his lips and took a deep draught, then he rose and attended to his horse, hobbling him loosely.

It was broad day when he awoke, and the air was full of the gay sounds of the jungle. Birds of brilliant plumage flew past him calling to their mates. From a forest of cocoa-nut palms came weird noises, and Herbert imagined that his friend the monkey must be telling his family of the strange visitant to their abode.

Then an impatient neighing roused him to the business in hand, and with a regretful sigh he mounted and bade farewell to his 'hotel.'

A few more hours in the saddle and Herbert knew that he was nearing the end of his journey. As far as his eye could reach spread plantations of the tea plant. Women from India busy at the plucking stopped their work and followed with eyes like black velvet the figure of the sahib on horseback.

It was afternoon when he at last dismounted at the gate of the big wooden building, or factory, that was his destination ; and he stayed awhile watching the scene, so familiar and yet so new to him. He saw old Muttu come out and speak to a coolie who immediately commenced to beat vigorously upon a tom-tom. Then from other buildings came the sound of strident horns and whistles. It was the sign for the pluckers to cease work and attend to the sorting. In little groups they came in and squatted beside their baskets—and then all at once the old man caught sight of Herbert. He peered a moment in astonishment, then came forward.

"The young master?" he said wonderingly.

It took but a few moments for the pair to be on their old familiar footing, and as they sat smoking on the wide verandah that en-

circled the factory, it seemed to Herbert as though he had never left the place. Slowly but surely the charm of this paradise on earth was wiping out the odious memories of his late life. Six long years—then he had been all anxiety to get away into the whirl of things; now Mother Nature was welcoming back the prodigal and showing him her abundance. And now he could appreciate it. Muttu heard the little sigh and looked up.

"The young master is sad—he has memories?"

Herbert laughed shortly.

"Yes, Muttu; I wish I hadn't. Don't let's talk of them. Have you ever heard of the 'Moon of Valleys'?" he asked.

"'Moon of Valleys'?" The old native repeated the words in a low voice. "Yes, I have heard of it. What do you want with the 'Moon of Valleys'?"

And he sat silent while he listened to the story of the chart as Herbert knew it.

"I have heard of the chart, too," Muttu said slowly. "Years ago a man from England had it, here in Colombo. He sailed for Paran, but no one ever saw him return. Perhaps he sailed for home direct, perhaps he——

And you say a young man in London paid his debts to your friend with it? It is strange."

"Nevertheless it is true, Muttu. I have studied it all carefully and will vouch for its authenticity. You know something of this island of Paran?"

"I have been there twice—that is, to the coast lands; strangers seldom get farther than that, nor do they want to, as a rule. There are wild stories of the interior—a place that seems not to have moved with the times. It is the India of a hundred years ago. The communication with the coast is very meagre, the mountains are practically impassable to strangers, and there are wandering tribes of half-civilised savages in the north. There is but one real road from the coast to the capital. The Dutch Resident travels it once a year on a visit of ceremony to the Rajah, and the Rajah returns the visit in state. It is merely a form. After that each go their own way—it is to their mutual interest that there is no bother. The Hollanders are too well satisfied with the rich lands that slope to the sea to trouble as to what is going on behind the hills. Now and again a band of

marauders swoop down and make a raid on some plantation, but the affair is hushed up in nine cases out of ten. Sometimes there is a hanging, but not often."

"An interesting country, Muttu. I am looking forward to it."

The old man's pipe fell from his lips.

"You are going there?"

"Four of us—yes, and as soon as we can. Do you know about the boats?"

Muttu thought a moment, and then:

"There is a boat that leaves Colombo once in three months. She sailed yesterday. She is a Calcutta boat, but is subsidised by the Dutch for the trip to Paran four times a year. But you won't want to wait for her!"

"Three months—why, no."

"You may be able to charter a boat. My cousin has a small coaster, but he is a greedy man—the price will be high."

"Can you come with me to Colombo, Muttu, now?"

The old man's eyes shone, and Herbert smiled as he remembered how Muttu always enjoyed his little jaunts to the coast.

"The young master can command me."

"I'd like to hear what the *old* master would

say if he heard you," laughed Herbert. "But so be it."

Far into the night they sat and smoked and talked of old times, but early the next day they were astir, and at the heat of mid-day were well on their way to the coast. They halted at the ruined city where Herbert had spent the night, and by eight o'clock the next evening they had bathed and dined, and were sitting on the verandah of the "Grand Oriental" with Reuben and Eddie, watching the busy life of Colombo that throbbed around them. Leah, in her own room, was writing letters to her friends at Dijon.

"And this cousin of yours," Reuben was saying, "can we see him now—this evening?"

Muttu nodded.

"He has a house in Chatham Street, or he had a month ago. I will send for him."

Within half an hour a lean Cingalese of some sixty years stood bowing before them. Unlike Muttu, he had mixed little with Europeans and spoke no word of English. Also, unlike Muttu, he had a crafty eye. Reuben and Eddie had to be content with watching

his gestures as the old man and Herbert questioned him. These gestures, although exaggerated, conveyed nothing to them beyond the fact that the man from Chatham Street wanted more.

At last Epgrave turned in his chair.

"This old duck seems to know a bit, but his price—whew!"

The 'old duck' sat gazing out across the harbour, his face shining with cunning and avariciousness.

Muttu rose. "I have many kinsmen in Colombo, gentlemen," he said. "I would wish to pay them my respects. With your permission my cousin and I will go while you talk it over. We will return."

Herbert smiled as the old man linked his arm in that of his cousin and departed. Muttu's relations had always been the laughing-stock of the plantation in the old days. They took the place of the office boy's grandmother whose many and sudden demises synchronised so remarkably with important football fixtures.

A visit from Muttu to his relations meant but one thing—that the old gentleman was going to get very drunk indeed.

The surmise was proved correct when after a space of two hours the ancient mariner returned alone. He was slightly under the influence of *bhang* himself, but he was wide awake to the value of his services. He took the trouble to tell them that Muttu was detained at the sick-bed of a favourite uncle.

The terms were high—very high—and even Reuben demurred a little before he agreed to them, but at last it was settled. In seven days' time the little boat would be at a cove some miles west of Colombo. The Cingalese himself would see to all the details. He also insisted on payment in advance.

"If we'd made enquiries in time," said Eddie as the party broke up for the night, "we could have caught yesterday's boat—it's rotten luck!"

It did not occur to any of them that two small Cingalese gentlemen had taken the precaution to make those same enquiries, and were now well on their way to the island of Paran, if indeed they had not already landed.

CHAPTER XI

MR CHUNDER MAKES HIMSELF OBJECTIONABLE

THE town of Sinha-dam wakes up four times a year. This is at the end of each twelve weeks when the boat from Ceylon and the mainland arrives at the little trading centre of the island of Paran.

Then does the town of Sinha-dam get up and shake itself. The genial old Resident, Mynheer Cornelius van de Weert, emerges from his Schnapps-engendered dreams and devotes himself to the cares of office—and more Schnapps.

The ' bazaar ' takes on an unwonted activity. Sheds, that for the past three months have been storehouses for all manner of merchandise, are swept out and decorated and dotted with little tables and cane-bottomed chairs for the sale of refreshments to the hordes that crowd into the squares and

alleys of the town, for it is high holiday. Bullock tongas and all manner of weird vehicles have for the past few days been lumbering into the narrow streets, bringing in the overseers from the plantations, some with their wives, some alas, without. Crop-watchers and reapers from the paddy fields, coolies from the tea and cocoa districts, demented-looking fakirs, water-carriers — all serve to make up a scene of bustle and colour not likely to be forgotten by Western eyes.

Wally Burns' manner as he stepped from the rickety gangway drew forth a sharp rebuke from Mr Chunder. It was not consistent with his rôle as a benevolent-looking Cingalese that he should stand open-mouthed like any American rubber-neck tourist.

Mr Chunder's sharp rebukes were getting rather frequent of late—much more frequent than Wally liked. Ever since the *Ramayana* had left Marseilles he had let the little mummer gradually see who was the master. In fact, Wally was getting not a little tired of Mr Chunder and all his works. The genial good-fellowship that had characterised their dealings in London was fast disappearing. Remarks that Mr Chunder had dropped from

time to time plainly showed that he was not the 'white hen's chick' who would think twice before drugging a man—or even killing him if need be. He had Wally at a disadvantage and he did not let him forget it.

They were seated after lunch in the courtyard of the wooden building that did duty for an hotel at Sinha-dam, each with a long drink before him. On the little jetty facing them, the one and only steam derrick was fussily at work upon the cargo of the newly-arrived boat. Near them, beneath the shade of a mango tree, sat the Resident, a genial, little rotund Netherlander, with the captain and chief engineer. A deferential native waiter stood stolidly by, his sole duty being to see that the illustrious trio did not run short of Schnapps, a not unlikely contingency seeing the rate at which they were going. From a distance, a medley of tom-toms and the cries of itinerant merchants mixed with the laughter of the holiday-making crowd. In a far corner of the courtyard an aged dark-skinned gentleman was tooting dismally upon a pipe in his efforts to lure the languid reptile in the basket at his feet into a false gaiety. A group of third-rate dancing girls from Co-

lombo were already making friends with two plump Dutchmen who had left their consciences behind them in their plantations far up on the hill-side.

"Are we going to have three months of this?" asked Wally suddenly.

Mr Chunder started out of his reverie.

"Anxious to meet your friends?" he hinted maliciously.

At this Wally coloured a little beneath his dye. It was uncomfortable to have one's thoughts read like this, and it put him at a woeful disadvantage. He had debated with himself very seriously the idea of deserting to the opposing camp as the lesser of two evils, although he had a shrewd suspicion that he had left it rather late, and that Herbert would want to know fuller particulars than he was, as yet, able to give.

Chunder was looking at him and laughing, showing his even white teeth.

"Another drink, Wally, my boy," he said, with a hateful gaiety. "No, I think your friends are far too anxious to wait for the next boat. We may expect them soon, I think. There is only a mile or so of coast where they can land, and I'll have it watched. Then——"

"Then?" repeated Wally.

"Then they can go ahead and we'll follow. You and I will let them do the work, and when they've got what they want we'll know what to do. We'll do the cat and the chestnuts act."

He called the waiter, and Wally noticed with a shock that his boasted ignorance of the Cingalese language was a lie. He pretended not to see it, but he felt the tail of Chunder's eye upon him.

There was another fact that, as the days passed, added to Wally's nervousness, and that was the apparent knowledge of Sinhadam and its surroundings possessed by his companion. During the week of festivity that held the little town in its giddy grasp Chunder moved about as one well acquainted with his bearings. Of an evening they would stroll round, entering mysterious alley ways, evil-smelling and inky in shadow, that invariably led to some dancing hall or tavern. And they would find their way back to their hotel from outlying districts with consummate ease, although Wally could not see his hand before his face. Again, at times a passer-by would nod familiarly to Mr Chunder.

Taking everything into consideration, Wally was not happy.

One little solace he had, and one only. A few years back, in the period before he had given up work, he had entered into an agreement to sing English songs at certain variety halls in Holland. He had met with quite a small success and it had become necessary for him to learn one song, at least, in the language of his audience. To his rescue had come a certain Mr Back, conductor of the orchestra at the Casino in Rotterdam, who had laboriously coached the actor. In the learning, he had picked up a little colloquial Dutch, and this stood him in good stead with some of the overseers who were making holiday. One day, on the quay side, he met a man who knew Romano's, and Wally almost wept at the mental pictures born of their conversation. His 'Arabian Nights' surroundings were all very well for a day or two, but he would have given the whole island of Paran, had he possessed it, to be set down with sixpence in his pocket in Rule's.

For a full week the festivities continued in Sinha-dam with unabated vigour, and it was not until the tenth day after the arrival of

the steamer that the little town resumed its wonted quiet. A few stragglers still lingered, loth to leave the scenes of their delights, but their gaiety was of a sad order. The dancing girls were on their way back to Colombo, the planters and overseers were at work again, and the little old gentleman had taken his languid snake back to the hills.

If the days had been irksome before, it can be imagined what his life now became to Wally. The men whom Mr Chunder had placed to watch the coast had nothing to report, and now the Cingalese spent most of the daylight hours tacking to and fro in a small canoe, to the great tribulation of the actor, who was forced to accompany him. The dancing halls and cafés were either closed or had reverted to their original dismal appearance, and the evenings were spent by the two men in the little courtyard of the hotel, overlooking the deserted quay and the waste of ocean. Where lights had gleamed and music and merriment sounded, now were black shadows and silence. Now and again swathed figures would shuffle across the little patches of moonlight that cut a brilliant pattern on the road. Mynheer Cornelius van

de Weert, his occupation gone, drank himself to bed at eight, after which the hotel-keeper resented anything in the nature of business. The disappearance of the Resident acted as a kind of curfew in Sinha-dam. It was all very depressing.

And then there came a day when one of the native watchers ran into the town in a vast excitement. He had seen a small vessel undoubtedly making for the shore a little to the west of the town. With many extravagant gestures the man demanded his reward.

Chunder rose hastily from his seat at the little wicker table and entered the hotel, emerging almost at once with a pair of binoculars slung across his shoulders. He signed to Wally to follow, and to the native to show the way. Until clear of the town they proceeded at a walk, but as the surroundings became desolate they broke into a run, the actor stumbling after them.

It must have been about a mile and a half out of Sinha-dam when the native slowed down and made a gesture of caution. They had reached a small but deep bay with a gently shelving beach. A stretch of silver sand, unruffled as the sea itself, reached in-

land to a rocky cliff some hundred yards back. The arms of the bay, however, were thick with rank vegetation, with cocoa palms reaching to the water's edge. Sure enough, a little way from the shore a small craft had dropped anchor.

Chunder led the way cautiously along one of the arms of the bay and lay flat in the tangled undergrowth. He signed to the others to do the same.

From his ambush and with the aid of his binoculars he had a good view of what followed. He saw the dinghy alongside the vessel and the Honourable Herbert assisting Leah to descend the little ladder. The others followed, attended by two coolies carrying a camping outfit.

The men were serviceably dressed as became those about to endure unknown hardships. Chunder noticed that they were armed. Leah, too, looking charming in her pith helmet, was also dressed suitably, but she had managed to retain a charming appearance. Her glorious hair was loosely coiled and hung in a dusky mass on the nape of her shapely neck, and her holland blouse was well open at the throat. A light walking skirt hung

gracefully to where, well above her ankles, it met a pair of boots which, although made with a view to hard wear, could not disguise the daintiness of the little feet they encased. The girl was full of vivacity; in fact, the watcher could see that the whole party were in the highest spirits. And he smiled evilly as he watched, and Wally heard him mutter some words in his heathenish language between his teeth—words that made the native by his side regard him curiously. Wally would have given worlds to know what he was saying.

Chunder did not move until he had seen the coolies arrange the camp for the night. Then stealthily he led the way back to Sinha-dam.

With the aid of the native, a crafty-looking ruffian, who had brought the news, he set about packing two knapsacks and attending to the oiling and loading of a small Smith and Wesson, the existence of which weapon Wally had not hitherto suspected.

The Cingalese did not seem to consider the little actor in the matter in hand, beyond telling him sharply to be ready to start at daybreak. He didn't even wish him 'good night.'

CHAPTER XII

THE WATCHERS

"WE'RE in for a tougher job than we expected, Eddie, my boy."

"Oh, I don't know—it's not going to be a picnic, if that's what you mean."

"Herbert says that these nigger chaps, who know the country, tell him Adam's Peak is a fool to the climbing we may have to do. I'm a bit frightened for—I mean I'm thinking what it will mean for Leah, that's all. It's a bit of an undertaking for a girl who has been ordered a sea voyage."

"Oh, she'll be looked after." Eddie laughed shortly. "The Honourable's generally on deck. Look at them now—domesticated—what?"

The little party had just breakfasted, and Leah was washing up. She was doing it, as she did everything, very daintily. The Honourable Herbert was engaged in what is

generally known as 'wiping,' taking the enamelled utensils from Leah's dripping hands and rubbing them vigorously with a cloth, then laying them to dry on the sand. He was a great help to her.

Eddie and Woolf paced to and fro on the little strip of beach until they saw Herbert throw away the dirty water and roll down his sleeves. Then they called to him and he came smiling across to them.

"This is something like—eh! Up-the-river is nothing to it."

He threw himself down on the soft sand and filled his pipe. Eddie and Reuben followed his example. Then they held a council of war.

Dockerty, who, had he been so inclined, would have made a very creditable draughtsman, had filled in his time aboard the *Ramayana* in copying the chart of the island, and with the help of the Honourable Herbert, translating it. He now drew this copy from his pocket. It was drawn to scale four times the size of the original, and the marginal notes were carefully lettered in English. Eddie was very proud of it as he spread it out on a large flat rock for their inspection. Her-

bert, who was, so to speak, in the chair, regarded it fixedly for a moment, then :

" We're here now," he said, and pointed with his pipe-stem to a little spot on the south-west coast. " Here, a mile and a half from Sinha-dam, is our starting point," he went on, drawing some papers from the pocket in his leathern belt, " and now we'll run over our programme." He re-lit his pipe and continued : " Old Muttu, who has been twice to the island, advised us to make straight for the tea plantation of Mynheer van Bol, which, he says, is the last link of any consequence with the somewhat limited civilisation of Sinha-dam. Now, the guy over there," he pointed to where one of the coolies, who in flaming yellow headdress was squatting beneath a palm, seemingly lost in contemplation, " says he can take us there in a few days if the weather conditions remain favourable. The difficult part of the journey is the start. It would be comparatively easy for us, I understand, to take the so-called road leading out of Sinha-dam, but we don't want to advertise ourselves more than we can help, especially after the affair on board. Very well, then—we must join this road, such

as it is, at the point Mr Dockerty has marked with a little cross—here. I'm afraid it is jungle, and pretty thick jungle at that, a good part of the way, but old 'yellow-hat' over there says it is more tedious than dangerous. Once we join the road our way is easy up to van Bol's, where we leave civilisation behind and take to the mountains. The old Dutchman himself may know something of the passes through to the Rajah's land. The emerald is undoubtedly hidden in the part of the island which our friend here has so beautifully shaded in. With care and luck we might miss the capital, Talabo, altogether—it would be just as well if we could. The other towns are, for the most part, unimportant, and I believe most of them are only inhabited by monkeys and peacocks, and (our guides will tell us) demons. There are many of these deserted places in this mysterious land of ruin."

"Then our first step is to the Dutchman's?" broke in Reuben.

"Yes"—and Herbert looked over to where Leah was writing in the shade of the tent—"we can leave Miss Woolf there if the journey proves too much for her. I've known

van Bol by name for years, through my father, who has met him in Colombo. He has a charming vrou and your daughter would be safe and happy with them—but we'll see. Perhaps she'll stand the journey better than any of us."

"I suppose we had better get a move on us as soon as we have had a day or so's rest. We've burnt our boats behind us with a vengeance." Eddie looked out to sea and pointed as he spoke. The boat that had brought them had started at daybreak, and was now but a speck upon the distant horizon.

Herbert nodded. "Our time's our own—we'll start in, say, a couple of days. We'll take another rest at——"

"Mr Epgrave, will you help me with the dinner?" Leah's cry came ringing across the beach and Herbert jumped up with a laugh. "Ask father if I can mix him a *bhang* and soda; I suppose they *do* mix?"

Eddie and Reuben, left together, grew thoughtful and somewhat moody. The clear consciences and the merry hearts of their companions were a source of continuous envy to them. They wished they could laugh like that.

"Somehow, Eddie, I think I'll turn honest, if this comes off; the more I see of Leah the more I hate myself. Why don't you marry and settle down?"

Eddie looked up quickly. "I'm afraid that is not for me," he said.

"Why, my boy, the girls rave about you, you're a sort of Adonis to them;—there's Maudie, she'd give the world to be Mrs Dockerty—and there's Julie——"

"Stop that, Reub, Maudie's career is too much like mine, so is Julie's—one should marry opposites, you know, and—I don't meet many decent girls."

It was only the merest glance that Eddie shot towards the tent as he spoke, but it was enough for Reuben, student of character as he was, to read his secret. He rose and put his hand on Eddie's shoulder.

"No, my lad, not that—never that. You and I are things apart. I hope my girl will marry Herbert—he's a splendid fellow. I like you too, Eddie, you know that, but she's so pure and good. It would kill her if she knew the games I play—*we* play. You'd not be happy either, Eddie, you'd never be able to scrape off the mire and mud of the last few

years; that stuff sticks. Cut it out of your mind. If she knew how we had got hold of that chart she'd never speak to us again, father or no father, you know that as well as I do.—By the by, I wonder where that nigger is. I'll swear he's the chap Charlie relieved of his pocket-book. I guess we'll have trouble enough before we're through with this. Keep your revolver handy all the time, Eddie, but don't shoot unless you have to. I really think I'm getting squeamish; I don't want anything more on my conscience, this trip, than I can possibly help."

Reuben linked his arm in Eddie's, and together they strolled over to the tent.

"It'll be ready in an hour or so, father; it smells *so* good—Mr Epgrave, what *are* you doing with that pepper?"

The watchers among the cocoa palms missed nothing of what was going on below them. Through his binoculars Chunder could plainly see the large map, and his hand clenched on the butt of his revolver. Wally was sleeping peacefully in a bed of choice orchids and tropical ferns. Above him were ropes of radiant blossoms and festoons of gorgeous creepers. He had his mouth open

and he was snoring softly. He was dreaming that he was on his way to Mr Bradshaw's to draw his thirty shillings.

The native lay flat with his chin in his hands watching, and always watching. His black eyes took in every detail of the scene before him. Now and again he would exchange a whisper with Mr Chunder, but his eyes never once left the little party on the beach.

For two days this sort of thing continued, the watchers only returning to Sinha-dam after they had made sure that Reuben's party were safely camping for another night.

Then, on the third day, there came signs of movement in the little camp that warned Chunder that the time of departure was near. The coolies were busy strapping up the tents, Eddie and Herbert were buckling their knapsacks on to their shoulders. Reuben carried a neat leather case containing the compass and a miniature medicine chest, and even Leah did not travel with empty hands, but carried her little writing-case wherein reposed a red morocco-covered book, on the first page of which was written, " My diary."

It was about midday when Chunder saw the

party disappear into the jungle, a little to the left.

The days that followed were to Wally one continuous tribulation, wherein terrors and misery crowded thickly upon him. Before the first day's tracking was over the weather changed for the worse. A merciless rain beat down upon them from a sky destitute of promise, and the country round was all but hidden in great masses of drifting mist. Reuben and his friends, equipped as they were with waterproof tents and a good store of creature comforts, were sadly hampered by the changed conditions. To the followers, however, it was sheer, unadulterated misery. Wally, almost deadened with trouble, had settled down into a state of abject despair; he cried out against his fate that he should be there at all—it seemed so absurdly unnecessary. What had *he* to do with the cursed emerald, anyway? Chunder, to make matters worse, plainly showed him that he was in the way. Any hopes that the Cingalese might have held as to Wally's being of assistance to him in his quest had long since disappeared, and the feeling of tired irritability that the actor had felt against him had given

place to a definite dread as he caught the beady black eyes upon him. He *knew* that Chunder would shoot him sooner or later.

The rain, too, had played sad havoc with his complexion, and Wally was a vain man at heart. Little crooked streaks of dusky white began to show through Agra's handiwork. He had lost his hat, and the bald patch on his head, being the most exposed, had quite regained its normal tint. Imagine also a thick stubble of reddish beard and it cannot be wondered at that even the stern face of Chunder broke into a smile as he glanced at the little figure-of-fun in the rain-sodden clothes that trudged beside him. The ludicrousness of the picture was not lessened by the umbrella, the broken ribs of which stood out at all angles, with which the poor little man attempted to shelter his devoted head. The two men rarely spoke.

Night was perhaps the most terrible time. They had no protection whatever against the weather. The native from the coast who had assisted at the watching had started the journey with them, but, no doubt influenced by the damp prospect before him, had deserted on the first night. Perhaps it was an

oversight that he should take the best part of what little stores they had with him. He had been carrying them all day and may have imagined he had a right to them. Be that as it may, he took them.

Sleeplessness had never troubled Wally until now. He had generally, throughout his latter life, managed to imbibe enough during the evening to ensure repose. The mouthful of *bhang* that Chunder doled out to him was but a mockery, and even that had stopped now that the Cingalese had noted the dwindling stock in the bottle.

For hours at a stretch Wally would sit in the loathsome jungle gazing fearfully around and trying to pierce the blackness for he knew not what. Thus he would sit, not daring to move hand or foot—his heart stopping at the least sound. At times the chattering of a monkey would cut the silence, awaking echoes that rolled and reverberated dismally.

Once, when he had managed to doze off for a moment, something roared, twice, back in the jungle. It was the last straw ; he would desert to the other camp at the first chance and risk the explanation to Herbert. Anything was better than this.

But the next day Reuben's party reached the plantation of Mynheer van Bol, and no opportunity presented itself of carrying his project into effect.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT THE DUTCHMAN KNEW OF '*THE MOON*'

THE plantation of Mynheer van Bol, which had been in the possession of his father and his grandfather before him, was the largest and most important of the whole island of Paran, and van Bol himself was a person of no small consequence. It was the hour of the day that he loved the best, the hour before supper, a meal that was taken early, for an hour after daybreak would see him again at his work. The rain had ceased, and there was a delightful aroma of fresh earth in the air. The sun was setting in a mass of violet cloud, and the last rays caught the vivid green of the paddy swamps that rose in little terraces on a far hill-side.

Van Bol was smoking his favourite pipe, a true Holland pipe that had been sent to him by his brother who owned a flourishing

hotel in the Hoogstrat in Rotterdam. Van Bol sometimes thought that he, too, would like to own an hotel in the city of his birth, but those who knew him best said that the old Dutchman could never leave the land of his adoption. After all, was not the dwelling-house just behind him built solidly in true Dutch style, with its thin, yellow bricks, its gables and its porticoes—its trim green shutters? Was anything more proper to be seen on the Zuyder Zee? Could not his vrou, now engaged in the preparation of his supper in the old panelled kitchen with its blue and white tiles, compare with any vrou in the Netherlands? Was not her headdress as spotless, the brass ornaments as bright, as those of any wife in Haarlem? So many of the women of Holland dressed for the painter chaps, he would say—all this was for him alone.

What was that moving over there among the mists rising from his land?

Van Bol put down his pipe and reached out for the field-glasses he generally had beside him when he sat on his verandah—or *stoep*, as he preferred to call it.

A movement certainly—a little group of

people advancing towards the homestead. They were not his coolies, who had long since left their work and were now with their families in the little bungalow town built by van Bol for their use—and besides, the costumes were not those of natives. The old man rose and took his way down the path between the fields leading in the direction of the group.

As he neared them, Epgrave detached himself from his friends and advanced to meet him. In his hand he held the letter from old Muttu. He removed his helmet and explained his errand.

Van Bol held out his hand for the letter with a genial smile, then, with a fine courtesy, put the envelope unopened in his pocket.

"Introduction? Tut, tut! bring your friends along; they are welcome. I'll read the old rascal's letter presently. Introduction, indeed—did he think I'd turn you away without one? Allow me, madame——" He took from Leah's hand the little writing-case she was carrying and led the way back to the house, calling to his wife as he entered.

After the hardships of the last few days the well-cooked supper that the good Hol-

lander and his vrou put before the travellers was acceptable to a degree. It was served in the quaint old kitchen, used by the worthy couple as a living-room—an apartment solidly luxurious with its shining copper and brass—its tiles that van Bol had sent for specially to Delft.

The meal over, Leah was taken charge of by the old wife, who had seen the lids slowly drooping over the tired eyes.

When the men were left to themselves van Bol rose and opened the glass doors that led out on to the verandah. "We'll take our coffee out here," he said, and calling a coolie gave the necessary orders. He himself carried out the Schnapps. Darkness had fallen whilst they had been at supper, but the lamp within the house gave the men all the light they required.

And when they were comfortably settled van Bol looked from one to the other with his little eyes a-twinkle. "And so you are after the 'Moon'?" he said.

A smile spread over the face of the Honourable Herbert as he tapped out the ashes from his pipe on the verandah rail.

"We want it, like all the children do—we

cry for the moon, and I suppose it will turn out to be green cheese."

The other two men regarded their host with interest, and begged him to tell them what he knew.

"Tell me first about your map," said the Dutchman.

Reuben produced the original parchment and related the fiction of the racing debt. He told it well and circumstantially, but Epgrave noted with astonishment that van Bol bent low over the chart in an endeavour to hide the disbelief that he could not disguise. Muttu had shown a like distrust, Herbert remembered, when he had heard the story.

"It is strange, very strange." The Dutchman's face was still bent over the table as he spoke. "I may tell you, gentlemen, here and now, that this is not the first time I have seen this parchment, but I have never had the opportunity of examining it. The Resident at Sinha-dam showed it to me. It was among some papers, in the hotel, belonging to a man whose body was found on my land—up on the paddy terraces yonder. His name was Chunder—the papers were sent to his son—in Devonshire, I think it was."

Van Bol paused and lit his pipe that had gone out.

"Shall I tell you the story of the 'Moon of Valleys' as I know it?" he asked.

Reuben replied with an eager nod, and the Dutchman plunged at once into his tale.

"A little over one hundred years ago Padaga, a noble of high standing in Kandy, knowing full well what to expect from the English when their war with France should be over, gathered together a band of men as vicious and unscrupulous as himself and ferociously attacked the peaceful old Rajah of this island. An inoffensive old potentate was Dharma, a man whose love of peace left him woefully unprepared for attack. For two days a most hideous massacre raged in his capital, when the old man, overcome by the sorrows of his beloved people, surrendered himself and his throne to his enemy.

"Padaga knew nothing of the existence of the 'Moon of Valleys' at this time, until a courtier, anxious to ingratiate himself with the new master at the expense of the old, spoke of it. Then the fat was in the fire, the old Rajah was thrown into prison, and a vigorous search was instituted, but succeeded

in bringing to light nothing but the chart—the same parchment which we have here.

"Now, the splendid old Rajah, who looked upon his possession of the 'Moon' as a sacred trust, could not but admit that at the first signs of trouble he had hidden the jewel away and that the roughly drawn chart showed the locality, but not the precise manner of hiding. It is without doubt the portion shaded in here in the work—west of Jaffapura—the notes on the margin of the chart prove that. Further, the dignified old man would not speak. Torture, and Padaga was a past master at that, was resorted to, but Dharma was adamant, and indeed seemed already to have taken leave of his hold on this life—he was a high-caste Brahmin and knew far more than we do. At last, completely exasperated, Padaga ordered the old man to be built up alive in a big rock temple at some distance from the town of Talabo. This was done, one small aperture only remaining open in case the victim felt inclined to give in. With a refinement of torture, Padaga held continual orgy outside the little opening, and the old Rajah's meditations were broken into by the sound of feasting and drunkenness, and

the jeers of the dancing women who looked in at him. And one morning a courtier, taking a glance at the prisoner, saw that the end had come. Old Dharma, his troubles over at last, was reclining in a corner of the rock chamber, dead.

"His tormentor, it is said, showed some sort of compunction when the news was brought to him, though whether for the loss of the Rajah or of his secret is an open question. Perhaps he was ashamed of his deed, for he cemented in the remaining stone with his own hands and caused many prayers to be offered while he did it. Moreover, he forbade any one, on pain of death, to talk of the event or to mention the spot where it was enacted.

"As generation succeeded generation the locality was completely lost, and, in fact, a great number of the inhabitants of the island look upon the story as legendary. My grandfather, however, told me he had ample proof of its truth."

Van Bol paused, and refilled the glasses. Eddie, as he raised his to his lips, paused suddenly and gave a keen glance to the dark end of the verandah. His eyes tried to pierce the darkness. Then he looked at the rest of the

party and saw that the Dutchman was about to resume his story. Eddie told himself it must have been a rat he heard.

"The next episode in the history of the 'Moon,'" went on van Bol, "was the sudden disappearance of the court painter, Chun Da, a treacherous old rascal with a most evil reputation, and an even bigger scoundrel than his master. With him disappeared the chart. He was suspected and traced to Colombo, and later to England, by two adherents of Padaga. They never returned. The story goes that the two natives caused a stir by being seen in their strange garb in the streets of Axminster, passing through the little town in the direction of the estate Chun Da had purchased. When questioned on the matter later, the old painter said that they were cousins of his on their way to London, and that he had driven them as far as Exeter. Be that as it may, they never returned to Paran. Neither did Chun Da.

"After this the country quieted down, and upon the death of Padaga, which took place within a few years, the 'Moon' seemed to be forgotten. It must have been about 'ninety-one or 'ninety-two when a traveller paid me

a visit here—an Englishman, but with undoubted Cingalese blood in his veins. He was bound for the interior, he said, in search of a rare orchid that he understood grew in the districts north-west of Jaffapura. All my attempts to dissuade him were fruitless, and when next I saw him he was lying dead over yonder. His papers, as I have said, were sent to his son. It must be the grandson of old Chun Da who gave you the chart. The name Chunder is palpably the same, only anglicised."

So ended the story of the 'Moon of Valleys' as related by van Bol upon his verandah.

His hearers were silent for a moment, then :

"It'll take a bit of finding," said Eddie, more for something to say than anything.

The Dutchman nodded.

"More than a bit, you'll find," he said. "I have always thought that if the death chamber of old Dharma could be found, the jewel might follow. As I say, he looked upon the 'Moon' as a sacred trust; I believe it has had a place in Indian history for many years, and I cannot but think that the old man must have left a clue at the last moment. It would seem to him like destroying the stone, to

leave it so securely hidden," he added, as he rose and led the way back into the house.

Unknown to the others he detained Epgrave in the kitchen.

"I know and respect your father, Mr Epgrave," he said. "I'm sorry to see you in this—no, wait a moment," as Herbert voiced his surprise; "did you *see* the man who gave Mr Woolf the chart? I mean the man with the racing debts."

"No—they told me."

"I thought so—you can take it from me that a Chunder never parted with that chart willingly. I'm an old man and I can speak my mind. Can you vouch for the honesty of your friends?"

Herbert coloured as he confessed that he had not given the matter a thought.

This was hardly true; the disbelief of van Bol taken with that of Muttu had given him a rude shock, but he was not the man to condemn his friends on suspicion.

"As a respectful friend of the Earl, I am a privileged person to his son. You are an Epgrave, that is enough for me. Your friends—well—men with eyes like Reuben Woolf's *cannot* go straight. Fate never meant that they should. Good night, my dear lad."

Through the mango groves, under the stars, two figures were trudging wearily back into the miserable shelter of the jungle.

"What a good thing you decided to make a bolt for it to-night, wasn't it, Wally?" one of them was saying with a nasty sneer.

The other did not reply—with bent shoulders he stumbled on, the smell of the Schnapps lingering painfully in his nostrils.

"—— and what a good thing that I should catch you there by the verandah and prevent you crying out. I was just in time, wasn't I? It was rather a neat spring of mine, wasn't it? I nearly choked you, didn't I? You see I didn't like to let go, in case you gurgled. They *do* gurgle sometimes, Wally."

Another pause—another silence.

"And what a good thing we were in time to hear that interesting conversation. What a dear old bird my great-grandpa was—drove them to Exeter, did he? Well—well—I'm quite proud of him. Do you know, Wally, I think, I really do, that I will be forced to—drive *you* to Exeter. You're such a damned nuisance, Mr Burns."

CHAPTER XIV

WALLY TAKES FAREWELL OF MR CHUNDER

THE two men had constructed a shelter of sorts, by means of bamboo and huge palm leaves, but as there was only room for one beneath its roof, Wally's sole connection with the temporary home had consisted in the building of it.

This being so, it is all the more curious that the little actor, who had spent the night in a bed of damp creepers, not unmixed, to his sorrow, with plants of the cactus family, should awake feeling fit. It was the hour of sunrise when he roused on the morning after the surreptitious visit to van Bol's bungalow, and the scene that opened out before his eyes was romantic in the extreme. The mists were rising in great steaming clouds, for October and November being the wettest months in Paran, the vegetation is super-

charged with moisture. From the branches of a Talipot palm, that stood silhouetted against the opal of the sky, a bul-bul was piping out his curious notes. Two or three Drongos, or King Crows, were darting in and out after insects, twisting here and turning there in amazing and unexpected flights that would have turned an aeroplanist green with envy.

Wally raised himself on his elbow to disengage a particularly vicious cactus which seemed to have grown into the small of his back, and looked towards Mr Chunder's shelter. He ceased attending to the cactus, and sat up—alert.

The Cingalese was tossing to and fro apparently in agony. His face was distorted with pain and little beads of moisture showed on his swarthy skin. He snapped his teeth and drew a hissing breath when Wally asked him what was the matter, but did not answer.

Apparently Mr Chunder was feeling far from well, and Wally cautiously approached.

Mr Chunder looked up, curling his dry lips in what he doubtless meant to be a propitiatory smile. "I'm all done up," he said; "some

sort of fever's got into my bones—look at my tongue—the thirst——"

Wally looked with a non-committal stare at the man lying before him and rubbed his reddish stubble thoughtfully. "Can't you get up?" he asked, at last.

The Cingalese gave a hollow groan.

"Not even raise myself ever so little, Wally."

"You're sure? Try."

Chunder made a convulsive effort and sank back, cursing.

"Seems to me," said Wally as he leisurely took a seat on a slab of rock, "that this is the opportunity I've been looking for; in other words, that this lets me out, as it were. They'll find you when the coolies come out to work, if you shout—can you shout? Never mind, don't try if it hurts you."

An evil look came into the eyes of the sick man.

"You're not going to leave me, Wally?" he breathed.

"It's going to be a very good imitation of it, cocky. I'd rather walk to the coast than drive—to Exeter—what?"

The Cingalese ground his teeth in fury, and

by a supreme effort managed to raise himself on his elbow. He seemed to be looking for something. Wally followed the direction of his eyes and with a chuckle possessed himself of the revolver.

He then busied himself in his preparations for departure. Within reach of Chunder's hand he put meat and drink. He also repaired a break in the shelter. He whistled gaily during these operations and made facetious remarks about Devonshire,—remarks which, despite their undoubted wit, were received in graceless manner by Mr Chunder.

And now all was ready, and the little actor took leave of his companion with a bow. Such a bow had, in bygone days, brought down the house.

Then he buckled Chunder's knapsack on to his own shoulders and stepped gaily out in the direction that he believed led to the coast. It must have been late in the afternoon before he found out that it didn't.

The absence of any landmarks they had passed on their way did not at first strike him as strange; he knew that even familiar objects lose their individuality when ap-

proached from different directions. But, as the time passed and morning gave place to afternoon and then to evening, the entire strangeness of his surroundings could be no longer denied. The spur of the mountain that he had had in view when he set out was still before him, but its shape had entirely changed. Instead of leaving it behind him, he was apparently walking *round* it.

Then night came on in a smothering blackness and the sounds of the jungle awoke, to their full, his terrors, and had it been possible he would have returned to the Cingalese. But that was as much out of the question as his reaching the coast. The revolver, which had been such a convincing possession in the daylight, now seemed a puny thing indeed as a protection against the unknown terrors that lurked in the darkness around him. He looked round for a likely tree in which to spend the night; he understood that tigers did not climb trees, but he had distinct recollections of seeing pictures of them sitting expectantly beneath them. After all, the beasts seem to know that there is but one exit from a tree. Elephants, too, he believed, had an unpleasant habit of uprooting them.

Altogether, the prospects were not rosy for the passing of the night.

But pass it he did, safely wedged in a fork of branches that was comfortable enough. He slept fitfully, but awoke considerably refreshed. With the first glimmer of dawn he looked down, fully expecting to see a patient man-eater watching him and awaiting his descent. In his semi-wakeful state he was surprised, if not actually hurt, at its absence.

In his safe position Wally remained until the sun had well risen, the genial heat drawing the terrors from his soul, even as it drew the mists from the earth. He made a hearty breakfast, although he partook sparingly of the stores in the knapsack, and relied largely on the many good things that grew around him. He had learnt from the Cingalese which of these were safe to eat.

To describe Wally's adventures of that day and of the week or so that followed would be but repetition. The days with their hopes, and the nights with their fears, succeeded each other in a sickening monotony. The little actor had entirely lost any sense of direction, time, or locality; he still seemed to be walking round a mountain, though whether

it was the same one all the time he could not tell.

The early hours of each day's march were spent in looking for food. He had fired with his revolver at one or two small animals, but the sound of the shots, echoing evilly through the woods, together with his utter inability to hit anything, prompted abandonment of the sport, so he gave it up. After each midday meal his whole energies were bent on the discovery of a suitable tree in which to pass the night. He became quite an expert, divining at a glance the branches that would fit him, and those that would not.

It must have been at sun-down of about the ninth day that the actor, comparatively happy in a bo-tree, awaiting the coming of the sudden darkness, heard a sound that was new to him. He had often heard the snapping of twigs as some beast of the jungle made a path, but this was, in Giles's words, 'a kind of a busting noise.' Wally turned cautiously and heard it again—louder, and then with a horrid sinking at his heart he felt himself going. He clawed wildly at the creepers, but their tendrils were wrenched from their hold at the sudden weight put upon them. The actor

fell in the mass of undergrowth, uninjured—when again came the sinking at the heart, and again he was falling. What had appeared as firm ground was but a mass of vegetation growing over the edge of an overhanging rock of a formation often met with in Paran.

Gradually Wally felt the heaving mass fall apart from under him. To struggle, he knew, was but to hurry the catastrophe. For a moment they seemed to hold, then again the rending began and the resistance grew less and less—then they seemed to hold again—and then he was through, falling—falling into the darkness.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE CAVE

OF course, it was only to be expected that Wally should lose consciousness, and it was a happy thing for him that he did so, for it caused him to spend an entire night in blissful ignorance. When he awoke or came to (he could never tell which it was), it was to find himself lying in a bed of dense foliage and gigantic flaming blossoms. Above him, silhouetted against the shell-pink sky of the dawn, was a broken mass of creeper, and above that again the jagged stump of a broken bo branch. The distance he had fallen could not have been more than twenty feet at the most.

He did not dare to turn, but lay, scarcely breathing, in the rhododendron bush that engulfed him like a huge feather bed. Fearfully he stretched out one foot, then an arm. It seemed firm, and he grew bolder, depressing

his chin hard upon his chest and rolling his eyes from side to side. Then taking a firm grasp of foliage in either hand he gradually and with infinite care wriggled himself into a sitting position, and saw that it was the easiest thing in the world for him to step down on to the ledge of rock two feet beneath him. He did so.

Wally's first thought as he gazed around him was of the frying-pan and the fire. The ledge, wide as it was, was nothing less than a prison as far as he could see. It appeared to encircle the rock that towered out above him. Climbing *up* was out of the question—how about climbing *down?* Wally advanced to the edge and looked over, then fell back, clinging to the wall of rock with a white face and a hissing intake of the breath, as though he had looked upon a fearsome sight. After that he kept well back.

He sat himself down upon a boulder and fell into a fit of abstraction. His hand stretched out and he plucked a rhododendron which he carefully placed in his button-hole. How long he sat there he did not know, but he was at last roused by the sight of a well-known object that hung on a projection of

rock near him. It was the knapsack, and in it was the remains of the *bhang*. Carefully he climbed the few feet necessary and secured the prize. He held the bottle against the light, sighed, and put it to his mouth—one sip, and he sent it hurtling over into the void beneath.

"No, Wally, my boy—the ledge is pretty wide, but perhaps it isn't as wide as you'd want it—if you drank that—it's very strong is *bhang*."

He laughed as he caught sight of the gorgeous blossom in his coat. He did not remember putting it there. Perhaps his brain was going, and he told himself it was about time, and that he didn't care if it did.

But the sip of the raw spirit had done good work. He roused himself to explore his surroundings. For about a hundred yards to his left, as he faced outward, the ledge or balcony maintained its level, although varying in width from place to place. Then it became suddenly narrower until it seemed to grow into the face of the rock and vanish. No hope that way. Very well, then, he must try the other way.

This proved a little more encouraging, but

not much. A few minutes' walk along the ledge, and it dropped suddenly, at the same time narrowing to a width, at places, of but a few inches. A pathway, perhaps, for those possessed of the strongest of nerves, but Wally's nerves were anything but strong, and personal courage had never been a point with him.

But wasn't it the only way ? He pictured to himself the death that must overtake him did he stay where he was—the terrible death by starvation. There was not a berry growing anywhere round him that he knew. He did not remember ever having seen any vultures in Paran, but he felt sure that there would be a wicked, bald-headed bird sitting on that stump of the bo-tree, receiving, as it were, bulletins of his condition. He had the same sensation of fear that he remembered once having in a dentist's chair—the fear that he should feel the forceps before the gas took effect. He didn't expect that his vulture would have any scruples as to whether Wally was quite dead or not. He believed they generally started on their victim's eyes.

Morbid thoughts—yes, but the very best that could have come to the actor in his

present condition. The path, perilous as it was, *must be taken*. He sat down and regarded it searchingly—as a general would a map of the land he had set himself to conquer. Step by step, foothold and handhold, Wally went along that death-trap in his mind. That the passage could be taken he was convinced; the creepers would give his hands a hold, and the ledge a rest for, at least, his toes. The distance was not far and led to safety—to a gently sloping mountain-side that, as far as Wally could make out, descended to the banks of the river that wound round the base of the rock. And then, before he was well aware of the fact, the actor found himself already started on his hazardous journey. It seemed to him that he was hanging by the hands over illimitable space; his toes resting on the little ledge, seemed far below him and as hardly part of himself. After one first look below, he never dared to turn his eyes from the rock above him, unless he shut them. Hand over hand he hauled himself along, his feet shuffling in unison. Once his left foot missed, and with a jerk a strand or so of the creeper he was grasping parted. He closed his eyes tight and felt around for a fresh

foothold. It was as though he were performing a grotesque dance on the face of the rock.

Surely the way seemed longer than he had mapped out; twenty steps were all that he had thought necessary, and he must have taken at least double that number. Another ten and he would risk one more look below him, even if it meant his death. He did, and burst out into a hearty laugh—partly of relief and partly at seeing that for the last ten minutes, at least, he had been in anguished fear unnecessarily, crawling along a ledge only a few inches above turf as smooth and safe as a village green. He could have stepped down on it at any time in the last thirty steps. Fate loves jokes.

He sat on the yielding greensward and looked along the way he had come. He felt very proud of his achievement and wished he could have been photographed in the act. He was afraid his friends at Rule's would think he was exaggerating.

And then with springy step he made his way downward. He was in no better plight than the night before, when he climbed into the bo-tree, but such is the effect of comparison upon the human mind that he felt as

though he were out of his trouble altogether. He could not have felt happier had there been a steamer awaiting him on the river below, to take him to the Thames.

As he walked, he saw that the descent was not to be such a simple affair after all. At parts the rocks and forest lands made it impossible; everywhere it seemed fraught with great difficulty, if not danger. He turned to the left in search of an easier path, and made his way round the mountainous rock. Really he seemed to be always walking round mountains. It was getting rather annoying.

He was worried, too, at the thought of the ever-present dread of night, which promised to add to its other terrors that of a storm. During Wally's stay on the rock above, heavy cloud-masses had piled up on the horizon, and now one or two large spots of warm rain splashed down upon him. Was he *never* to get over his troubles?

His experienced eye had noticed the entire absence of any inhabitable tree wherein he could safely take his rest, and this fact worried him considerably. The weather, moreover, made a drier shelter necessary if one could but be found.

He had walked for about half an hour before he decided to return to a little group of rocky caves that he had noticed, all but hidden in the mass of vegetation that clothed the hill-side. Now Wally was not fond of caves; in his wanderings he had spent one night only in the shelter of one, and he never cared to dwell upon the horror of that time. True, the situation of these particular caves made them extremely unlikely to be the haunts of any wild beasts, but had there been a tree, the actor would have preferred taking his chances of a wetting.

He tore apart the creepers that formed a luxuriant curtain before the mouths of the caves, into the darkness of which he peered fearfully, one by one. Sometimes he would advance a few yards into the gloom of an opening only to emerge immediately and try another.

All at once the fact was borne upon him that what he was examining could not be the work of Nature alone. Peeping out between the foliage Wally had caught glimpses of carved designs of what he took to be lions, with broad idiotic faces, and festoons of

flowers and lotus leaves, that were plainly the work of man.

One of the openings particularly arrested his attention. Remains of a delicate tracery were distinctly visible on the blocks of masonry that piled up at the entrance to the cave. A small aperture only was to be seen, barely enough to allow of a man's body crawling through. The thought that he could perhaps block this up from the inside after he had entered, together with the fact that it was now raining quite heavily, decided Wally on the choice of this spot for his night's lodging. Laboriously he crawled through, and found himself in a room that had been hewn out of the solid rock. The light that filtered through the crevice by which he had entered was too meagre to allow him to make a guess even at the dimensions of the chamber. He felt for his matches; he had but two, and one of these, as he attempted to strike it, proved itself useless on account of the wet. Rather than risk the other he laid it aside, where he could find it in the morning, in order that it could dry. Then with great difficulty he went to sleep—

if the dull lethargy into which he sank can be called that.

During the night the storm increased in violence, sweeping the countryside, howling dismally through the crevices and caves of the rock, as though all the demons of Eastern lore were let loose. At the first signs of daylight Wally rose and felt for his match. It was quite dry, and carefully selecting a spot that was free from draughts, he rubbed the sulphur lightly on the rocky wall.

There was a splutter—a moment of suspense—and the flame rose steadily. Wally held it aloft and looked around.

His body stiffened and his eyes grew big as he peered into the gloom at the back of the cave. Crouching among the shadows sat an old, old man. His knees were drawn up, his chin rested upon them, his hands encircled them. He seemed to be staring at the actor.

The match in Wally's fingers trembled violently, so that the moving light threw fantastic shadows across the eerie scene, shadows that played amid the sunken eye-sockets, filling them with life, and causing a smile to flicker round the bared teeth.

Then the flame reached the actor's fingers

and expired, and he made for the aperture, his face showing a mask of terror in the pale light that came from without.

For some reason or other, that he would have found difficulty in explaining, he walked on tiptoe.

CHAPTER XVI

LEAH'S DIARY

IF one were to look up the word 'diary' in a dictionary, I fear I should be accused of misnaming these few poor lines of mine—confessions might be a more apt description. Here in the silence of the jungle I can, perhaps, find time to write in this book more regularly. My world has been so full of new things that I have had no time to record them. I have just read over the little I have put down—five closely written pages, and have gummed their edges and stuck them together. They are only of interest to me and, perhaps, one other. They were written on the *Ramayana*, and those nights on the Indian Ocean, so full of poetry, were wonderful indeed to me.

There comes a time in the life of every girl when it is hard to keep the fullness of her thoughts to herself. Had the sweet mother, whose face smiles at me from my little locket,

lived, I would not have had to write those pages. The little locket was before me all the time, and my poor written lines show marks of tears. It seemed as though her spirit had returned across the years to hear her little girl's secret.

And now the leaves are closely gummed, they are mine—*mine*, and I must start my 'journal' afresh.

We have been for the last few days encamped in a little clearing of the jungle, a head-quarters from which the men go out in turns searching for something. They tell me they are on the track of the rock-temple wherein old Dharma met his death, and about which Mr van Bol gave us the information. Herbert—there, it's written; I had intended to put Mr Epgrave, but I won't alter it—says they must come across it sooner or later, and that it may lead to the securing of the wonderful emerald we have travelled so far to find. But the "Moon of Valleys" has no attractions for me now—I can never look upon it as mine; I am so unhappy about father.

I have tried—God knows I have tried—to put the terrible thoughts from me, but a look,

an overheard word brings them crowding back upon me with an insistence that cannot be denied. It is hard for a daughter to lose faith in one who loves her, as in his own way my father undoubtedly loves me. Little incidents in the past year, since I left the convent, rise before me and take on a new and terrible significance — midnight visits of strange men—sudden absences of my father from England.

I know now, as though it had been told me, that we have no shadow of right to this wonderful "Moon of Valleys." I know, too, that Mr Dockerty is with my father in this, and I know, Heaven be thanked, that Herbert is not. The secret that my father and Dockerty hold is not shared with him. I know that he has been weak in the past, but he is another man now; he tells me that he has done with his wasting days, and that I have brought the happy change about. I am proud to think that perhaps he is right.

It seems to me that Fate has been singularly kind to me in giving me the love of this man for that paternal love she is taking away.

From where I write I can see my father and Eddie Dockerty. Perhaps it may be

fancy, but my father's face does not seem the same since the knowledge has come to me of his true character. As I look at him now, I think I can understand the sorrow that I sometimes see behind the eyes in the locket.

. . . . .

Away up on the face of the cliff I can see Herbert. The dear boy is evidently prowling about in the eternal search. I wish that I could find it in my heart to tell him what I have found out, but I am afraid that for the present this little diary must be my only father confessor. Sometimes I think that he, too, suspects something. I have noticed that, since leaving van Bol's place, he has been rather quieter in his manner, and I have seen him at times regarding the other two men in a curious way. If I told him, and it confirmed his own suspicions, I am afraid at what he would do. The party would be broken up, and without Herbert, my father would be in a bad plight. I would rather they stuck together and found the 'Moon.' It will be time enough to look for the rightful owner then.

By the way, I had nearly forgotten a

curious thing that happened last night. We had all retired with the exception of Dockerty, whose turn it was to take the first watch. The night before had been a terrible one of rain and wind, and although the storm had quite passed over, the air was still charged with an oppressive heaviness, and sometimes one heard the distant mutterings of thunder. There was no moon, and one seemed to feel the weight of the darkness. I slept very badly, and I seemed to have just dozed off when I awoke suddenly with that eerie feeling that something was responsible for it. I lay still, my eyes striving to pierce the blackness around me. I could hear Dockerty quietly whistling a comic song that some one had sung on the boat coming over, but the sound was low and drowsy ; certainly it could not have been that which woke me up. I crept softly to the opening of my tent and peered out into the night. Dockerty was standing silhouetted against the camp fire filling his pipe. He had stopped whistling, and as I watched him I heard a cry that came piercing through the night from the hills above us.

Dockerty straightened himself into an attitude of listening. For some moments he re-

mained stationary, I watching him, and also listening with all my ears. Then :

"Mr Dockerty," I whispered, and he started violently and turned towards me. "What was that ?"

"You heard it too, then, Miss Woolf ? I thought it was perhaps my fancy the first time I heard it. Maybe it was a bird, one of those gaudy creatures we saw this afternoon. There's a lot of weird things around these parts."

"A bird doesn't say 'hallo.'"

"It *did* sound like that, Miss Woolf, didn't it ? Even if it was a parrot it must have learnt it somewhere."

He spoke lightly and with a little laugh, but it was palpable that the man's nerves were a-jangle.

I sat down by the small camp fire and he brought a rug for me, and together we listened for about half an hour, watching the dancing shadows thrown by the flickering logs. But it was all silent, and the fresh air giving me more appetite for sleep, I turned in again and did not wake until Herbert had prepared breakfast.

Naturally the sound that we had heard was

the topic of conversation. I doubt whether I would have been believed had it not been for Dockerty's corroboration. These solitudes have a curious effect on the nerves, and one might easily distort what one sees or hears. Indeed, when I first woke, I thought it was a dream: the cry, the camp fire, and our night vigil.

. . . . . .

I was just putting this little book away when I caught sight of Herbert descending the cliff. He is not alone; there is a little man with him—a white man it seems. That cry was no imagination.

CHAPTER XVII

WALLY MAKES A GREAT EFFORT

WALLY had allowed himself only those two cries in the night. It was really too much for the poor over-wrought nerves. The sounds cut into the silence like a knife, and returning, wound themselves around him in fantastic and terrible echoes. They awakened the sleeping life of the jungle into protesting and peevish chatter.

Yes—two cries were all that he could stand.

How he had spent the day since his discovery of the figure in the cave he could not have told. From time to time he had made up his mind to re-enter and solve the mystery, but each attempt left him less morally fit for the effort, and the approach of his enemy, the darkness, made further attempts quite out of the question.

He felt, too, as though he lacked all power to get on his way again, and, after all, he had

no way to take. The trackless solitudes of which he seemed the tiny centre offered none to him. And so for hours together he had sat, a picture of despondent inanition gazing into the valley beneath him.

Towards evening he had seen, or thought he had seen, a thin spiral of smoke ascend lazily above the trees, and he had mildly wondered what it was.

He slept fitfully, and it was in one of his frequent waking spells that he had seen the glow of the camp fire, and it had brought back the memory of the smoke.

He debated long within himself as to whether to make his presence known or not. Chunder, with the idea of terrifying him, had often regaled him with stories of the cruelty of the lawless tribes of the interior—the demon-worshippers who lurked in the forests—and he felt he would rather risk the vultures than come into close relations with them.

Again, it might be Chunder himself camping down there among the trees.

Even as the shouts left his lips he was but half conscious of what he was doing. It was as though his voice acted independently,

and the sounds frightened him horribly. They died away, leaving the silence more intense.

And now, in the clear light of the morning, he saw the Honourable Herbert climbing up towards him—Epgrave, who imagined him to be leading a life of indolent dissipation at Ellaline Terrace—Epgrave who would naturally want an answer to certain questions.

He judged it would take Herbert at least half an hour to reach the spot where he sat, and he saw that he was, so far, unobserved. This gave him time. He lay low, feverishly debating the pros and cons and concocting the story he would tell his deliverer.

He saw at once that the change of clothes he had been able to procure during his stay at Sinha-dam, together with the return of his skin to its natural colour, would prevent his identity with Chunder's companion on the *Ramayana* being guessed at. So far, so good. This showed him a way out, and when at last the aristocratic figure of the Honourable Herbert appeared, the actor advanced with outstretched hands.

"At last, Herbert," he said; "thank 'eaven."

Epgrave started as though he had been shot.

"Wally!"

"Yes, my boy, *Wally*—oh! thank 'eaven I'm in time."

Herbert sat down on a rock and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"In time?" he queried wonderingly.

"Yes—I—I had to come—you're in danger."

"In danger?" Herbert seemed incapable of anything except repeating Wally's words.

"Life and death, Herbert—oh, to think that I'm in time."

The man on the rock took a cigar from his case.

"Look here, Wally—this beats cock-fighting all hollow."

"Yes, my boy, and hen-racing and all other manly sports,—seen anything of a Cingalese chap?—he's on your track—ugly-looking devil."

"Don't ask me. I'm knocked. Explain, Wally, there's a dear boy."

Wally seated himself beside Epgrave on the rock and prepared for his great effort.

"It was this way," he began. "You know

you asked me to bring down a bag to you at the dock the day you went off to India. Well, I did, but I was a few minutes late and the boat had just gone. I was watched—followed—knocked senseless—with a crow-bar, I think it was—and came to myself in a cellar full of great black niggers. From them I heard my fate, and yours. They drew lots before my eyes to see who should follow you and kill you—don't interrupt me, Herbert, old chap.—They told me that you were a thief and had pinched a paper of theirs, and they tore up the bag and looked in the lining and everywhere. They didn't find what they were after and their language was something dreadful, and they knocked me about instead of you. It was the bag did it. They said it was *their* bag.

Wally paused for breath—and ideas, and went on again.

"The lot fell on a chap they called Chunder, and another, and they were despatched on their foul mission, to follow you up and do you in."

"They were on the boat, Wally—Chunder and a little undersized worm of a man—ugly little beast."

The description did not quite suit the actor, but he was powerless to defend himself, so he merely nodded and resumed his story.

"Well, I escaped—I'll tell you all about it later—through a trap-door and fell down into the river. I caught sight of an old treacle barrel that was floating down stream and got in it,—I mean caught hold of it—and made my way as best I could to an old disused wharf—Limehouse way it was—and pulled myself up with a chain that was hanging there. Then I went into a pub, said I had fallen in the river, and I borrowed an A B C and reached Brixton ever so late, and had to knock up Ma Pinnitt.

"She wasn't half pleased to see me, and gave me some dry clothes—said she thought I'd got run over or something, and she gave me some hot rum, and in the morning I went and told my tale to Bradshaw, and said I wanted to get off by the first boat to warn you.

"First of all he was rather rude to me—he doesn't seem to like me much—but in time I impressed him, and on my signing a paper he advanced me a little money, and to make sure he wasn't being done, bought my

ticket and saw me off. I came overland and got trace of you at Colombo and found the man who had brought you over here. I gave him the rest of my money and he brought me over, too. That's all; it's been a trying time, Herbert."

Beads of perspiration were running down the actor's face. It had been a magnificent effort.

As for Epgrave, strange as the story sounded, he could not but believe it. In fact, doubt never entered his mind; the mention of Chunder and the Cingalese boatman carried conviction with it. He leant over and took Wally's hand.

"How can I ever repay you, Wally, for coming over to me? Chunder *is* on our track —or *was*. We haven't set eyes on him or his miserable-looking friend since we arrived at Colombo."

"But I have, Herbert—he's on this island now."

Wally spoke in an awed whisper. "I passed him two nights ago. Saw a camp fire and thought it might be you. He was asleep; I didn't half get a fright. He was over yonder. He's alone—the other chap—

I thought he was rather a pleasant-looking young fellow myself—seems to have gone. Suppose you haven't got such a thing as a bed down there? I haven't seen the inside of one for an age. I can't talk any more till I've slept. And, Herbert, do you still carry that hunting flask? What I've been through I can't tell you."

Good Scotch whisky did wonders in restoring Wally to himself again, and it was with a glad heart that he accompanied Herbert to the camp. He wanted to elaborate his story as he went, but prudence caused him to be silent. Surely his luck had changed at last and his lines fallen in pleasant places, and it was for him to see that his good fortune lasted. Last night he was an outcast on the very edge of death, and now he suddenly found himself a hero.

At the midday meal of the camp Herbert repeated the story. They wanted Wally to do so, but he wisely refrained, pleading fatigue. He was perfectly sure he could not go over all that he had told Herbert without contradicting himself; besides, to hear that story from other lips refreshed his memory in a most useful manner. As Herbert pro-

gressed, the actor made mental notes and even put in a word or two from time to time that lent considerable colour to the original fiction.

The hero's health was drunk by all the party, the hero himself not excepted. And then they rolled him in a blanket and put him inside one of the little tents.

It was evening when he awoke, and with his customary craftiness he lay still, raising one eyelid only to take stock of his surroundings.

Dockerty and Epgrave were sitting just outside the tent discussing their plans, and it was easy for the little actor to hear all that passed between them. At the first words he decided to lie as he was and feign sleep.

"——on a hill-side they all are. Now those caves up there seem to me to be just the place where they bricked the poor old boy in. Everything points to their being in this district somewhere."

Slowly there came back to Wally's mind the story told by Mynheer van Bol upon his verandah, the story that he and Chunder had overheard as they crouched in the shadows.

He saw at once that chance had shown him what the others were striving so hard to find.

Of course the old man whom he had seen in the cave was the earthly remains of the unfortunate Rajah Dharma, whose knowledge of the "Moon of Valleys" had led to his death. Wally had played too many double games in the last few weeks not to have learnt that a secret such as he now found himself possessed of made his position a strong one.

Long after the men outside the tent had gone away he lay and turned the matter over in his mind; there were many points for him to consider. Should he go back alone and explore the cave in search of the clue which the old Dutchman seemed to think Dharma had left behind him at the last moment? Wally had little stomach for the solitary life again, although at the same time he could not but think that the "Moon of Valleys" morally belonged to him.

Again, he thought that should he even be lucky enough to obtain the jewel, it would be valueless to him. He had no method or means whereby he could convert it into cash. Doubtless these men who were after it knew their book and were better acquainted

with the emerald market, and, with the knowledge that he could now impart to them, his share should be a good one.

Yes, it would be better far to tell them and take his chances when they cut up the profits. First of all he would speak to Herbert about it. Woolf and Dockerty he did not like the look of much.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CLUE

THE Honourable Herbert listened in silence to the story of Wally's discovery in the cave, and preferred not to notice the undoubted hint that they two alone should profit by the happy chance, and the actor knew the upright mind of the other man too well to press the point.

The rest of the party were told without delay. They were all beginning to feel the effects of their continued failure to light upon a clue of any sort, and the news acted upon them as a much-needed tonic, stimulating them to further action.

It was arranged forthwith that, with the exception of Reuben, whose age and inclinations were against the stiff climbing that the journey entailed, and the two native servants who would remain to guard Leah and the camp, the other two men, under the guidance

of Wally, should follow up the thread in the history of the 'Moon' that had come so unexpectedly into their hands.

The little party started shortly after sunrise, and at the end of an hour's hard work among the boulders and jungle that covered the hill-side, came out upon the grassy slope where the little actor had spent such a weary time and whence he had sent forth his cries into the night. It was here that they had decided to rest and eat the few provisions they had brought with them, but their keenness would not allow of more than a wait of a few moments before they advanced to the cave.

Eddie at once removed his jacket and attacked the masonry with a pickaxe, while Epgrave and Wally toiled manfully with hunting-knives, cutting and tearing away the tangled creepers and mosses with which the blocks of stone were covered. It had been decided to clear away an opening to admit of easy entrance instead of being content with the hole which Wally had entered by. This latter was all very well, as Herbert wisely remarked, to go *in* by, but suppose

they wanted to get *out* altogether? It was hardly the exit for three men in a hurry.

The cement that held together the huge masses of carved stone was hard with age, and Eddie had to be relieved time and again before they had cleared away as much as was needed. After that they sat down and took a little rest. Then Herbert brought from his pocket a piece of candle, and having lit it, suggested a start. Wally's suggestion that he should remain where he was, in case anybody came, met with many smiles but scant appreciation, and they advanced in single file, Herbert with the candle leading the way. Next came the little actor, his face showing a lively terror, whilst the rear was brought up by Eddie Dockerty.

They found themselves in a vast cavern, the regularity of which proved it to be the work of men's hands. From the walls weird carvings of figures, famous in Buddhism, gazed sternly down at the intruders. The light from the candle in Herbert's hand threw these giants of solid rock into strong relief, played tricks with their proportions, and gave to their faces unexpected shadow-expressions that were, to Wally at least, utterly terrifying.

To his excited imagination huge arms seemed to shoot out from the walls and make clutches at him, clutches that he even found himself ducking to avoid, so realistic were they.

For some twenty yards the little party went forward into the darkness, then the leader turned to the actor.

"Where's the old boy, Wally—been dreaming?"

Fearfully Wally turned and peered around him. There was something wrong somewhere. What if his nerves had, after all, played him a trick? He half hoped at the bottom of his heart that they had.

"I—I—d-didn't come as far as t-this," he stammered; "p-p-perhaps there's a passage or something—something that leads off from here."

"Perhaps there is, Wally—we'll go back and look."

Herbert handed the candle to Eddie, who led the way back towards the entrance.

The little man's surmise was correct; the main entrance, or hall of the cave, divided a few yards from the spot where they had broken in. The smaller, on the right hand, was the one that Wally had slept in, and in

their haste the men had overlooked it. In a few moments they came upon the figure of the old man, exactly as the actor had described.

There it sat, steadily regarding them, solemn in its rigid silence. When Herbert spoke, it was in a whisper.

"Seems sacrilege, doesn't it, to disturb him? He'll fall to pieces, sure as a gun, if we move him."

Eddie nodded.

"We'll take a good look round first; there may be no need to touch him at all."

He led the way, as he spoke, into the shadows that lurked behind the body of the old Rajah, stepping warily between the ornamental pillars that appeared to support the roof over their heads. It was curious to note that everything within the chamber was carved from the rock itself; the columns, frescoes, statues, altars, and thrones for the priests were all part and parcel of the cave. With infinite labour these workers of a past age had tunnelled and hewn, embellishing with decorative carvings as they went. Ornamental foliage and grotesque figures on the capitals of the columns towered in bulky

masses above the heads of the three men, and from them came occasional rustlings as of birds, who, no doubt, nested in their crevices. More than once some small snake would glide between their feet and slide away into the blackness.

They made a careful but fruitless search; there was no sign of anything that might be remotely connected with the emerald, and after an hour or more they found themselves standing again before the dead guardian of the place.

Eddie went on his knees and passed the candle up and down and round the figure. It was seated upon a small slab of rock which, in its turn, rested upon another and longer slab. It was Herbert who pointed out that a small space showed between the two.

"There's a hole there," he said. "I've seen one of these before. They call them *pandu ornas* in Ceylon. I don't remember ever seeing one *inside* a cave, but there are scores near the temples of the Northern Provinces. They were used by the priests as dyeing-vats for their yellow robes. They used to rinse them in these affairs and spread them out on the slab."

"Which means," said Eddie, "that we must move him—well, come on. Mr Burns, will you catch hold of that arm?"

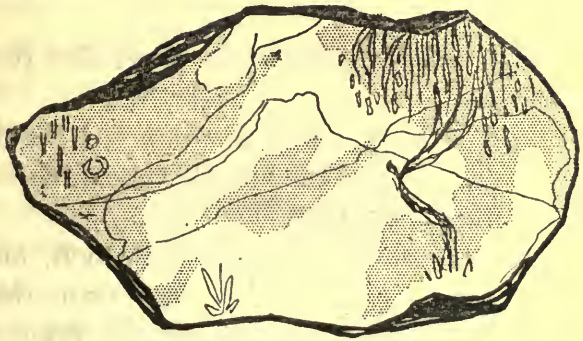
"No," said Wally.

The others, however, were not troubled with any such qualms as possessed the craven soul of the little actor, who nevertheless consented to hold the candle.

Carefully as Eddie and Herbert went to work, the poor remains cracked and came asunder, as they gradually raised them from their throne, and laid them as reverently as was possible on the ground beside the slab. Taking the light from Wally's trembling hand, Eddie held it down into the circular cavity which came into view under the smaller slab.

At first he could see nothing, but as the rays of the candle penetrated into the dusky corners of the recess, he reached down and drew out a small piece of stone. It had evidently been rubbed down until one side was worn smooth, and upon its surface a curious design had been scratched. It depicted, as near as the men could judge, a tree with a background of mountains. There were also dots and dashes set at more or less regular

intervals, that might, or might not, have a meaning.



The design, such as it was, had been graved with some sharp instrument that gave a firm but fine line on the smooth stone, and Eddie explored the cavity again with the candle, and after a minute search brought out—a tooth.

"Now," he said, "we can tell if this message is the work of our friend yonder, or not."

He led the way to where the remains of the old Rajah had been laid, and looked at the mouth. The flesh had long ago curled back from the gums, and one glance was sufficient to see the gap in the row of perfect teeth.

"Bit of a hero, the old boy," said Herbert admiringly; "seems to me—— *What's that?*"

'*That*' was the echo of a revolver shot that came rolling up from the valley.

"Reuben after a bird for dinner, I should say—made me start a bit, all the same—— There, there's another."

Two more shots in quick succession, and then the air was pierced by a scream that caused the blood to run cold in the veins of the men in the cave as they heard it.

With one accord they made for the exit. How thankful they were that they did not have to wait and wriggle through one by one. The scream was a feminine one, and to Eddie and Herbert was fraught with fearful meaning.

It was not far, but it took them the best part of half an hour to descend the hill-side, first one and then the other taking the lead, leaping from boulder to boulder, now letting themselves down small precipices with the aid of the creepers and boughs, now racing across open spaces of grass. Fear kept Wally not far in the rear.

Eddie was the first to reach the camp.

Lying on his face, in a clump of long grass, was Reuben Woolf.

He showed no movement, and Dockerty first turned his attention to the little tent that was set aside for Leah's use. It was empty; the camp stool was overturned, and the cloth of the little table had been dragged to the ground. Amidst its folds were writing utensils and the girl's diary. A glass that had held some scarlet tropical blossoms lay smashed to atoms, and the ink from the ink-stand made a little pool amidst the disorder.

When Eddie at last returned to the body of Reuben Woolf, he found Herbert already kneeling beside it. He had turned it over, and was feeling in the region of the heart.

"Done—good God—through the chest—here"—he pointed to a little hole over which the blood had gathered in a dark red mass, then taking out his handkerchief he spread it over the white face.

The eyes of the two men met across the body, and each read the thoughts of the other. Wally had sunk down in a dead faint at the edge of the clearing.

Herbert pointed to the still form at their feet. "And now for the living," he said.

"Where are the guides? They're responsible for this."

They separated, and ran to and fro in the dense bush that hemmed in the camping ground. In a moment Eddie returned dragging a yellow-turbaned native by the shoulders. The man was crying out in his own language, and Herbert ran up.

"——they came, four of them, and took the young lady away. My brother is dead, like the master—he lies there."

He pointed a crooked and shaking finger behind the tent, where sure enough lay the body of the second guide, a knife buried to the hilt between his shoulder blades.

With eyes rolling wide with terror, the other told his story, how they were surprised by two natives of a lawless tribe under the command of a small Cingalese, who, however, took no part in the fighting. Woolf had been shot at from cover, and the guides, before they could take action, were attacked. Mindoo, the survivor, had taken to the jungle, and had succeeded in lying hidden. The attacking party had made a hasty retreat, carrying the young sahiba with them. They had gone to the north-east.

There was no doubt as to the man's truthfulness, the dead body of his brother in itself was proof of his innocence. As he finished telling his tale Eddie was already collecting together a few necessaries for a journey. The tent and most of the baggage were put aside.

"We'll travel light," he said.

Herbert also packed up a few things in his knapsack, including the stone they had brought with them from the cave. It hardly seemed worth while, but he took it. He picked up the little book that Leah had evidently been writing in when attacked, and raised it to his lips. Then he found a corner for it among his other things.

In less than ten minutes they were following the traces of Leah's captors through the jungle. Wally, hardly yet conscious, stumbled in their rear.

The body of Reuben Woolf they had placed in a thick mass of creepers. It was as he would have wished.

CHAPTER XIX

HERBERT TAKES UP LEAH'S STORY

IT is but right that I should preface what I write in this volume by an explanation. I took the dainty little book from my knapsack thinking that there I might light upon a clue of some sort in what my dear girl had written.

We have got through the day somehow—a day of hard going and fatigue, and I am now the only one awake of the party. I took the first watch with Mindoo, and together we went over the whole affair. The native proved himself most useful with his knowledge of the country. He is now asleep, poor fellow, like the others, but my anxiety will not let me follow their example.

There are a few pages gummed together at the beginning of the book, and I have not yet disturbed them. What I have read elsewhere, however, has shot a ray of hope into

these dark days. With the knowledge of her love things look brighter. I cannot think but that my darling is safe. I *will* not think otherwise. If, as we suppose, it is Chunder who is responsible for the abduction, it can only be a matter of ransom, and that, time and energy can combat. The girl is worth more to her captors, whoever they are, alive than dead.

I also note with a sense of relief that Leah has seen through the machinations of her father. Ever since van Bol put me on my guard, I have been at my wits' end to know what to do for the best, both for Leah's sake and my own. And now I am to be spared the breaking of the news to her, and—well, poor Reuben lies back there in the jungle.

Hampered as they must have been by the presence of their captive, the slayers of Reuben Woolf have made good progress. As to following them, this has been made a simple matter by the recent heavy rains. The marks they left denoted the presence of three men; two pairs of naked feet that kept equidistant behind each other pointed to their owners being the bearers of some sort of litter, the occupant of which it does not

take a Sherlock Holmes to deduce, seeing that nowhere can I find a trace of *her* little boot.

Beside the litter, now on one side, now on the other, a man wearing European shoes has walked. This points to Chunder.

The rapidity with which they have come the distance, and the way in which they have chosen the open spaces, skirting the denser patches of jungle, shows plainly that they are not, like us, unacquainted with the lie of the land they have covered.

It was with the greatest reluctance that we camped at all, but tired as we were it was necessary—and yet I cannot sleep.

Mindoo tells me we are but seven miles from Talabo, and that half an hour will see us in cultivated country once more.

How we cursed this darkness that has beaten us by the margin of time, and caused us to lose track of our quarry. At the same time, there can be no reasonable doubt but that they are making for the capital; in fact, Talabo is the only place they *can* go to.

I understand that north of the city the country is entirely given over to beast-infested forests reaching to the coast, which

on the northern shores consists of immense rocky cliffs.

Our greatest trouble is that we must put in twenty-four hours here, with the best patience we can. Mindoo knows Talabo and says that the advent of a white man would constitute such an event that we would frustrate any designs we might have by publicity. He is to make his way into the city, where he has friends, who will smuggle us in in the darkness. Chunder, he thinks, has taken the same precautions, which accounts for his hurry. He will, no doubt, spirit my dear girl through the gates to-night whilst we are night-bound outside. I would like to make what way I can at once, but Mindoo's judgment is sound, and it would be foolish not to listen to it.

For his own sake Chunder will keep Leah hidden, the Rajah Sinha being the last to whom the presence of a white woman within his domains should be made known. Mindoo's plan is briefly this:

He will enter the city to-morrow and spend the day looking up an old friend, who has a house not far from the southern wall, and with him come to us at nightfall with a con-

veyance and disguises enough to pass muster in the dark. We will take up our quarters at his house, and after that—we are on the knees of the gods. We are to make a detour, so as to approach Talabo from the north, so that with any luck we shall avoid Chunder, who, if he watches at all, will in all likelihood confine himself to the southern gate.

Eddie is turning and muttering in his sleep. I cannot doubt but that he was hand and glove in with Reuben, but I am sure there is *some* good in him. I can swear he is as anxious as I am over this affair. It is not the time to let anything else weigh.

As for Wally, he is snoring magnificently, and I hope is sleeping off some of the misery that seems to have been his portion all day. I have felt rather a brute, after all he has done for me, to see the poor little chap stumbling along after us. I took his arm once or twice on the way, but he shook me off each time and broke into a little idiotic amble that at other times would have made me laugh, but under the circumstances was only pathetic.

Eddie is turning again and stretching. I don't want him to see me writing. I'll try to sleep.

. . . . .

I am writing this at the house of our good friend to whom we owe so much. His name is Itmad.

True to his word Mindoo arranged everything, and brought him to us at nightfall with a bullock wagon. Here we donned our disguises, Itmad rubbing our hands and faces with a preparation he had brought with him in a little silver box. Our own clothes we hid in the cart.

We had a little difficulty in getting Wally to take to the disguise—he said he had had enough of it, and then explained hastily that he meant he had had enough of it when he took a part in the "Cingalese" at a London theatre. I don't remember him ever taking the part, but it doesn't matter. He gave in at last, and we found a place for him in the cart. Eddie and I walked, and in this way we passed through the northern gate of Talabo, the sentry of which, thanks to Itmad, was considerably under the influence of some potent spirit.

Owing to our choosing the further gate, the way to our host's house was some distance, and we had a good impression of the city as we threaded its quaint and ancient streets.

It is a curious place, utterly unlike anything I have ever seen—a ruined city, and yet a city teeming with life. The impression I got at once was of ants busily running in and out of a skeleton. Noble colonnades and porticoes, rich in carving, were used by the hawkers to tie their ragged and gaudy awnings to. Mangy curs prowled in and out the splendid doorways unchecked. Chattering women leant from handsome windows, and on the sills sat naked little children.

We passed unnoticed in the darkness. Sometimes a pair of limpid eyes would be turned upon us, but only for a moment in idle curiosity.

Itmad had supper prepared for us. He lives alone with one daughter, a graceful girl of eighteen, with eyes like liquid night. He has treated us royally, and I am writing this in the little chamber he has given me for my own use.

It seems hard that I should have to sit here and content myself with writing. It is not safe for us to risk our thin disguises in the daytime. I raise my eyes, and the little city lies spread out before me, gleaming and silent, and somewhere among its ruined

splendour is my love. Oh! the thought is maddening that I can't go to her. In a few hours it will be dark, and Mindoo will have returned. He is away at the southern gate watching for Chunder—if he appears he will follow him. Fortunately, although he caught sight of Chunder at Woolf's murder, he does not think that he himself was noticed.

. . . . .

Another day. Yesterday Mindoo saw nothing of our enemy. There was a suspicious-looking native who hung around the gate all day, or strolled up and down the road in its vicinity. If he is there again to-day he will be followed.

We went out yesterday at nightfall and wandered about the streets. We visited the low quarters of the place, sitting in dark doorways and in what pass for cafés in Talabo. We took street by street, scanning the windows in search of a sign. Leah is a sensible girl. She will guess that we are searching for her, and will, if she is able, leave a clue for our guidance—a glove—a scrap of writing.

But it was all fruitless. Talabo goes early to bed, and we returned after a couple of hours no wiser than when we set out.

Away to the east, as I sit here, I can see the palace of Rajah Sinha, a magnificent pile of gleaming white domes and minarets that show their delicate tracery against the topaz sky. It is all very beautiful, but how I long for the curtain of night to shut it out, so that we can get to work again.

CHAPTER XX

HERBERT'S STORY—*continued*

MINDOO returned last night much later than on the evening before, and when he came he brought some news. The mysterious native had again put in an appearance at the gate, and Mindoo had seen him pass a word to a man whom, although some distance from the gate, he made out to be Chunder. At the closing of the gates, the native made his way through the town to a house by the river, Mindoo in close attendance. On his return we did not lose a moment; our great chance was to strike before Chunder suspected we were in the city. If, after some days, we did not put in an appearance at the gate, he would suspect he had somehow been tricked, and would be on his guard.

How I cursed the unlucky fate that had given to both Eddie and myself eyes of blue. This fact, taken with my fair hair and Eddie's

close curls, makes our disguise a very difficult matter for close-quarter work.

It was arranged that Eddie and I should accompany Mindoo at once. Wally did not mind being left at home, and, after all, he is of little use on an expedition of this kind. To avoid remark I walked a little way behind the others, keeping them in sight, however. I went along with my head bowed down, and with a morose and unhappy aspect, well calculated to freeze any one off who sought my company. I need have had no fear, however; your Talabian is not a social fellow, and the few men I met looked every bit as miserable as myself.

Our guide led us down the main street of the city with its depressing air of faded romances. The moon was high in the sky, and cast into heavy shadows the alley-ways and courtyards of the houses. On past the palace, towering white into the velvety sky. Past its gateways with their red-turbaned guards with drawn scimitars. The small windows, with their faint coloured lights, gleamed like jewels set in the marble walls. There was no sound or movement, save a low, crooning song, and a melody of strings that came from

one of the arched doorways, under which I saw for a moment a shrouded figure and a pair of flashing eyes; then they were gone.

It was, perhaps, a hundred yards past the palace when I saw Eddie and Mindoo turn and be swallowed up by a shadow on the left. I hastened, fearful of losing them, and came on them awaiting me.

"You must walk carefully, and you must feel your way," Mindoo told us, and walked on. It was now a case of single file, and very close behind each other for fear of losing our leader. The street, if street it can be called, was at places hardly more than a yard in width, so that one could touch either side as one walked. It was steep, too, necessitating at places the use of square slabs of stone, set in a series of rough steps. Above our heads the houses appeared to be falling upon us, their balconies all but meeting those of their opposite neighbours; between them, far up, a little strip of spangled sky.

As we descended, the street widened considerably, until it gave on to a wharf built of rough stone. Beyond this the river glided, lapping idly round the few craft that rode at anchor by the landing steps. These were

nearly all pleasure boats belonging to the Rajah, and used by his women, whose apartments were in the white building that rose sheer from the opposite side of the water. A fairy-like bridge of marble, with little turrets, connected this with the palace itself. This way was, of course, private to the Rajah; the bridge that served the inhabitants of Talabo was a little down stream, and to this primitive structure Mindoo now led us. As we crossed the flimsy affair of ropes and planks, it swayed horribly, and I was glad that we had left Wally at home.

Safely over, we found ourselves on another wharf, in many respects similar to that we had left, and Mindoo hurried us across the open space into the shadow of a doorway. He drew us together and pointed to a house that stood a few yards up towards the palace. It must have been very late by now, for the surrounding city was in utter stillness, broken only now and again by the cry of some prowling dogs disputing the possession of a tit-bit of refuse.

The house to which Mindoo drew our attention was a square, solid-looking building of a dull yellow, surrounded by a wall of the

same colour, and of medium height. From where we were we could see no door, but we noted that the wall would be easy to climb. As we stood in the shadow a shuttered window was pushed open, and a man appeared on the balcony, the light from the room shining full upon him. He advanced to the slender railing, and leant over in the act of listening. He looked carefully up and down the wharf, and into the little garden beneath him. He seemed to be satisfied, for he re-entered the room and closed the shutters again behind him.

Silently we felt for the safety of our revolvers, and creeping forward to the house, Eddie and I scaled the wall, choosing a corner where a large shrub-like tree gave us cover, and silently dropped into the garden, leaving Mindoo on guard outside. We waited some time, but there was no further movement from the balcony, and we began to talk in whispers as to our plan of attack. Eddie was just telling me that he considered it safer to——when a door opened suddenly, and a ray of light threw us into strong relief against the dark greenery of the garden. It was all so sudden that I hardly know if we saw the

brace of revolvers levelled at us from the doorway, or heard the silky voice of Chunder speaking from the balcony, first. He was giving instructions to two or three native ruffians as to our capture, intimating to us the while that the slightest resistance would be fatal.

We knew the man and his methods too well to doubt him; besides, we had the bead drawn upon us, and we had to submit to our capture with the best grace we could muster. Perhaps we would have a chance later.

We were disarmed and bound, and led into a room on the ground floor, an apartment almost bare of furniture, lit by a small swinging lamp, and closely shuttered. I have said we were *led* in, *pushed* in were the better word. We heard the door bang, and turned to find that we were alone.

It was, perhaps, ten minutes before the door opened again, and Chunder came in. He was smoking a cheroot, and he came forward warily—kicking the door open to its fullest extent and waiting a moment before entering.

He looked at us narrowly and laughed.

"They told me they had caught two

natives trespassing in my garden—well, well —which is Mr Moore and which is Mr Burgess? Pardon me, Mr Dockerty, your turban is coming unwound. Ticklish things these calico cadis, what!"

Eddie cursed him, and "The game seems yours, Mr Chunder," he said, "— so far."

Our enemy bowed, as though we had been complimenting him.

"Yes—bit of luck, eh? Got the chart on you—my chart? It's a far cry from the Victoria cloak-room to Talabo."

"And the young lady?" I put in. "You can have the chart and welcome, if you return her."

Chunder looked at our bound hands and laughed evilly. At the same time he now seemed to be really angry.

"I can have the chart," he said, "welcome or not. Who are you to make terms? But I want more than the chart."

We did not answer, and he went on:

"Miss Woolf, who has done me the honour of being my guest, tells me that you have discovered a cave, a certain rock-temple, with a curious history. My father nearly dis-

covered it once—and died. The lady will not say where it is. That's for you to do."

"Have we your word to restore the young lady?" It was Dockerty who spoke.

"She is not in the house—but I will tell you where she is."

Eddie and I discussed the situation in a whisper. There was nothing for it but to give in to the man who held all the cards. After all, we had the stone that we found in the temple, and could swear that it was all that *was* there. Chunder was welcome to all he could find—*now*. Besides, we had Eddie's copy of the chart, so felt we were losing nothing in handing the original over to the Cingalese, with the information he wanted.

"And now, gentlemen," as he placed the parchment carefully in his pocket and edged to the door, "I will tell you where Miss Woolf is. She was here this afternoon—now she is at the Palace."

Our faces must have shown our consternation, for he went on with a leering smile.

"Yes—I was very careful not to let the Rajah hear about her—you see, he's rather fond of ladies—but his Vizier, an ancient old rascal, got wind of it, and sent her an invita-

tion. You know the sort of invitation I mean, brought by six of the ugliest-looking soldiers I have ever seen. I really couldn't refuse, and so—well, she's at the Palace."

A groan broke from my lips, and Chunder turned to me.

"So that's how the wind blows, eh! I'm sorry. Rajah Sinha himself is away hunting up in the north of the island, however, so your girl's safe so far. I imagine the Vizier has planned this little affair as a pleasant surprise for his master on his return. He's a bit out of favour just now, I'm told, and he thinks this will do him a bit of good. You ought to be able to wriggle out of those cords in an hour or two. I don't fear your following me a bit; you'll be kept busy here. There are some things that you English prize more than emeralds."

He bowed ironically and left us, extinguishing the lamp before he went.

There was silence between Eddie and me, until we made sure that Chunder and his men had left the house; then we shouted loudly to Mindoo, whose instructions had been explicit—not to come to us until we called. This was a presence that the Cingalese had

not counted upon. In a few moments Mindoo had burst through the window and was at work on our bonds, and then we were out in the garden debating what to do.

Far up the river, the lights from the windows of the Rajah's harem shone in the water.

CHAPTER XXI

SITAGAMA

MINDOO shook his yellow turban in a way the others did not like at all when he heard the story of Leah's presence in the Palace. He glanced up to where the white bridge spanned the river, and told them that they could do nothing there and then—that the guards were too strong. Besides, how were they to know that that dog of a Chunder was not lying? Would it not be as well to search the deserted house? In the morning he would himself try and gather information.

This advice was so palpably sound that Eddie and Herbert acted upon it at once, but although they searched the little building, room by room, they found nothing to show that the poor girl had been there at all.

On their return to Itmad's house the way was smoothed out for them in an unexpected way by little Nata, the old man's daughter.

No sooner had Itmad heard the story than he called the girl to him and questioned her eagerly. Epgrave listened, and translated the gist of the matter, which was that Nata had a devoted slave in the person of a burly giant who was a member of the Palace guard. The pretty little maid smiled with a bewitching assurance when Itmad asked her if she could make her lover tell her what she wanted to know. As Eddie put it, hers was the sort of smile that would make a man throw bricks at a rich uncle if she asked him to. It was arranged that Nata should go to the Palace in the morning, and with that the party had to rest content.

During the period of inactivity that must pass before her return, a plan of action must be decided upon, so that no time might be lost if it was put beyond doubt that Leah was really a prisoner.

The fact that Rajah Sinha was away from the city was, of course, something to be devoutly thankful for. No harm, for the present, could come to the captive, but whatever plan for her release was formulated must be acted upon at once. There was no telling when the amorous potentate might tire of

big game and decide to return to the dissipations of his capital.

Now that Chunder was out of the city there was no longer need to make a secret of their presence in it, and the men thankfully removed the dye from their skins and again got into Christian raiment and, to a great extent, their spirits revived at the change. Poor Wally's wardrobe was sadly in need of attention, so much so that the little man hardly dared set foot outside the house, such a figure of fun did he cut. Even when new raiment was procured for him he did not look much less like a low comedian. A coat and trousers of white drill are all very well in certain circumstances and on certain figures, but when they are piped with yellow and five sizes too big their effect upon a small Englishman, with a sadly humorous face and stubble of reddish beard, is peculiar. The hat, too, that Itmad purchased for him was one of the most extraordinary that the hatters of Talabo could muster—a curiously idiotic little hat, perfectly round and adorned with a large green button on the top. Itmad produced it with the rest of his purchases, and so proud did he seem of it that the men had not the

heart to reject it. It only needed the bright red native shoes to complete the picture, or, as Wally put it with one of his rare smiles, the "make-up."

Eddie's and Herbert's clothes showed but little signs of wear, and altogether the trio was quite presentable.

Nata, on her return from the Palace, fully confirmed Chunder's story. The military lover had been twisted round the little brown finger to good purpose, and the girl had wheedled out of him the knowledge that Leah was well treated, and had been given a private apartment in the northern wing of the zenana—that facing the river. Nata could even show them the window; it was the fourth from the bridge, down stream.

Now, it had been decided that a bold front should be shown, and an interview with the Vizier demanded at once. It was hardly likely that the old minister would refuse to see two Englishmen, if asked for an audience.

The journey to the Palace was a never-to-be-forgotten one. A group of curious natives followed the little party with an insistence that was somewhat embarrassing. With the exception of an occasional Dutchman, they

were the first white men to grace the thoroughfares of Talabo within living memory and, as such, were on no account to be missed. Old men crept out of doorways, and little wide-eyed children were lifted up on to window-sills.

But they were an orderly crowd; they did not jeer, but only gazed stolidly—and followed. Perhaps Wally was the centre of attraction, the 'star part,' as it were, of the little production. He began by telling them to '*mizzle*' off, but the crowd only stared the harder.

At the Palace gates the mob reluctantly retired, and Mindoo having said a few words to the guard, the Englishmen were admitted to an outer courtyard. Mindoo left them at the entrance and, acting on their instructions, proceeded to the river, there to procure a boat and cruise around in the vicinity of the zenana, where he might come in handy. He was to pay special attention to what took place at the fourth window.

Whilst word was being taken to the Vizier, the three men looked about them in undisguised wonder and admiration. The courtyard was oblong in shape and tiled with alternate squares of grey marble and white, set

diagonally. The walls, broad at the base and tapering up gradually to their rounded tops, were decorated at regular intervals by little turrets, or observation towers, to reach which steps were cut in the sloping walls. Beyond, the minarets and cupolas of the Palace showed against the coppery blue of the sky. Marble vases containing flowering shrubs, such as the men had never seen before, were dotted here and there, whilst from a carved basin in the centre a thin jet of water rose gracefully in the morning air.

The luxurious surroundings (in spite of his new hat the green button of which being invisible to the wearer was soon forgotten), had done much to dispel the settled melancholy that had lately possessed Wally, and he grew quite happy, so that Eddie and Herbert began to hope that he might yet be useful to the enterprise in hand.

Their thoughts were cut into by the return of the messenger with the news that the Vizier was ready to receive them, and they followed the man through endless passages and corridors, apartments and courtyards. Rooms were crossed, on the floors of which were spread rich carpets from Persia and

Turkey, costly silks of many colours hung on the walls, and everywhere was the gleam of silver and precious stones, and the perfume of scented fountains.

As Wally tersely remarked in quite his old style, the Rajah "did himself well."

Through the windows, as they passed, they caught glimpses of great balconies, and again through their balustrades of delicate lattice, the city itself lying in the sun—a mass of white and pale yellows and browns, upon which an awning here and there splashed a note of stronger colour.

Their guide paused before a more than gaudy curtain, and struck a bronze gong. The sound was repeated twice from behind the curtain, and the latter was then drawn aside. The men entered and bowed.

A venerable old rogue was Sitagama. Although slightly bent with age—he must have been all of eighty—he cut a remarkably dignified figure in his heavy black robes and orange sash and turban. On the latter blazed a magnificent opal, and the hilt of his scimitar and the chain around his neck were of gold and encrusted with all manner of gemwork.

He received the party as though they were ambassadors. Epgrave, as the only one with a knowledge of the language, replied suitably. Eddie and Wally had to be content with what they could pick up from the gestures and the few English words that Herbert intentionally let drop as a guide to what was going on. He also let drop a few rather personal remarks pertaining to the Vizier that it were well the latter should not hear.

He told the old ruffian that he and those with him were travelling through Sinha's country with the object of exploring the lands north-east of the capital, with a view to important concessions in the matter of mining that would mean a deal of profit to the Rajah and, incidentally, to his ministers. He said that he was under the protection of the Dutch and English Governments. There had been a lady with them—a cousin of Queen Wilhelmina of Holland, but she had disappeared. Could his Highness help find her? He said that King Edward, who was the lady's uncle, would be very annoyed if anything happened to her. He said she was his favourite niece.

Whether Mr Sitagama saw through him or

not would be difficult to say, but if he did his face did not betray him. He would not commit himself. He bowed continuously and said he didn't know—anything he could do——

"She was seen near the Palace—perhaps the guards——"

"You think she is *here?*" The old man's horror was quite pathetic in its righteousness.

"I am open to conviction that she is not," answered Epgrave.

The Vizier grew darkly red at this.

"You wish me to *prove* it—me—Sitagama."

"As you will—put it that we should like to see over your pretty palace."

The Vizier bowed and clapped his hands in approved Arabian Nights style, and an attendant appearing, he gathered his robes around him and led the way. The old man seemed in his element. For every room there was a history, every jewel was an encyclopædia of horrors. This tapestry was wrested from Rajah So-and-So, this golden throne from some one else. The Vizier had a vivid and graphic way of dealing with tortures that made his hearers' blood run icily through their veins. The visitors were treated to an

orgy of murder and sudden death such as they had never heard of or imagined.

At the foot of the white bridge Sitagama paused.

"Over there," and he waved his hand, "no man can go—it is for the Rajah himself and his women."

"But surely the Vizier can go anywhere—especially at your age," Epgrave, rather unkindly, added in English.

"The Vizier—yes, but pardon me, you are dogs, and the curses of Khama will be——"

Herbert coughed a little irritably.

"Now, look here, my ancient friend. Your master will have something to say to this when he returns. It may mean war with Germany, and—oh—lots of things.—Now, are we going over that bridge or not?"

For answer Sitagama turned and walked slowly across the bridge. He spoke a word to his attendant, who said something in return that sounded like *wuh,* and looked at his scimitar.

Epgrave also said a word, and three hands tightened on three revolver butts.

Across the river, and a narrow doorway opened in the wall and the party found them-

selves surrounded by a spacious colonnade that ran round three sides of a square courtyard. Between the pillars they caught delightful glimpses of the ladies of the harem, graceful brown little creatures roaming like deer among the alabaster fountains, and, like deer, raising limpid eyes to the newcomers. In the air was a heavy scent of jasmine. Wally took off his little round hat and bowed.

A dainty ripple of laughter came from a group of colour by one of the pillars, and before the little actor could bow again he found himself pulled violently back, and a big negro was pointing with his scimitar to where the others were ascending a little stairway let into the corner of the courtyard. He followed. The dainty ripple of laughter seemed to grow in intensity.

With many a gesture old Sitagama showed them over the place—all but one chamber, the one which Epgrave judged to be lighted by the fourth window. In the matter of this room the old man was firm. It was the private apartment of the Rajah, and not even *he*—he tapped his chest impressively—dared

to cross its sacred threshold. As for infidels, and dogs——

For the first time during the interview Herbert showed signs that his patience was wearing out.

"Look here, my friend, a little less *dogs*, if you don't mind. Excuse me while I tell my friends that they cannot go in there"—then in English:

"Eddie, you take the big nigger, I'll settle this old guy. Wally, you be ready to assist either—NOW!"

A well-directed kick on the black's wrist, and the ugly-looking scimitar flashed in a circle and clattered to the ground. The able demonstration of *ju-jitsu* that followed was a revelation to the poor man, who did not recover from his surprise until it was all over and he found himself gagged and securely trussed up, whilst a little man with an idiotic hat, perfectly round, with a green button on top, sat on his chest, nervously fingering a revolver.

Herbert was engaged with the Vizier, on whose neck Eddie had a knee. They were tying him up with his orange scarf, and Dockerty was vainly trying to push back the

curses that spluttered out between the fingers that he held over the old man's mouth—such a string of oaths, so magnificent in their fullness, that Epgrave had to stop once to congratulate him. He said it was a pity to gag him, but he did.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FOURTH WINDOW

THE spot where the incident happened could not be described as one very fitting for the purpose, had a choice been offered. On either hand stretched a long expanse of marble corridor, into which, at any time, some one might come, and in that event discovery was imminent and escape impossible. From the courtyard below there still came a ripple of light laughter and the muted sound of strings.

Leaving Sitagama to the care of the Honourable Herbert, Eddie ran lightly along the passage, trying the doors on either side as he went. They were, for the most part, locked, but at about the fifth attempt one of them yielded to his silent efforts, and it was then but the work of a moment to carry the trussed-up figures out of the way of immediate detection. It was an ordinary

Eastern chamber, roomy and padded deep in rugs, with a huge ottoman in the centre, and on to this luxurious couch they bundled the old Vizier. Here they would be undisturbed, at least for a while, and the three men at once set about tightening and making sure of the bonds of the prisoners. For this purpose silken hangings and costly shawls were commandeered from the apartment, and so turned and twisted round the limbs of the unfortunate Talabians as to make movement on their part, or sound, practically impossible.

From behind the delicate ivory filigree that fringed the window of the room Herbert, keeping well back in the shadow, peeped down into the courtyard below. Evidently nothing was, as yet, suspected. The ladies were still very busy doing nothing, and the big black attendant at the foot of the little stair nodded drowsily over the drawn scimitar that lay across his knees. Really it seemed impossible that anything in the nature of action could take place in that languorous air of laziness. At the same time, by way of contrast, things had been happening fairly quickly with the panting men upstairs, and as Herbert looked at the cursing eyes of the old Vizier, he felt

that, could the old rascal get loose, there would be still more action for all of them.

From the gold chain around the old man's neck they detached a small ring, on which were strung two or three keys; in all probability the keys of important chambers, of which that of the fourth window might well be one.

This surmise proved correct, and in a few moments the great door with its carved and inlaid panels swung silently back on its hinges.

The intruders found themselves in a small room which served as a hall to the larger apartment, from which it was divided by a rich curtain of some heavy dark material, upon which was embroidered in gold thread and pearls some incidents of Indian mythology. Eddie drew this gorgeous affair aside and, as he did so, from the chamber came a shrill scream of terror, but a scream that was evidently stifled before it could do much harm.

In a moment the men were in the room, gazing at a curious sight. Upon the thickly carpeted floor lay a richly clad native woman, whilst above her, her knee upon the heaving

brown chest and her little hand over the full lips, was Leah Woolf. She raised her head as the men entered, and turned a little face, flushed with excitement, upon them.

"Speak to her, Herbert—*do* tell her she must really be quiet—I can't make her understand. Tell her—tell her—I'll kill her if she screams. I heard it was you outside, and she nearly spoilt everything. Oh, *do* be quiet."

Together the men saw to the silencing of the outraged native lady, while Leah rose and put back the little tendrils of hair that had escaped during her exertions. She looked at the girl on the floor and stamped her little foot.

"The little she-devil—I'd like to kick——" and she fell into Herbert's arms in a flood of tears. And Herbert folded her to him, kissing her tenderly on the hair, the eyes, as though they were quite alone.

Eddie's face was white and drawn as he turned to the window and stared out across the river. He had not expected much chance with Leah since Herbert had appeared upon the scene, but he had, at least, hoped for a fight. Even now he reluctantly gave up hope, but he saw that neither fair means nor foul

would avail him, so it must be a stiff upper lip for him.

He pulled himself together and faced the lovers.

"Mindoo's down there, Herbert, with the boat—it's about a twenty-foot drop——"

He broke off and moved swiftly to the door, which he softly shut, pushing home the heavy metal bolts. Then he bent an ear to the crack and raised his hand in warning.

From the corridor there came the sound of hurried footsteps—of naked feet running. Up the marble passage they pattered, and then in a moment they were back again—more of them—and now there were anxious mutterings and heavy blows upon the stout door.

Hurriedly the men searched the room for something which would serve as a rope. Hangings from the walls and the turbans, which had formed part of the disguises, were requisitioned, and a rope of many colours fashioned therefrom. With the butt of his revolver Herbert then attacked the aperture of the window, smashing away the delicate ivory tracery that bordered it—and the line of retreat was ready.

Leah paused with the rope secured knotted

beneath her armpits, then crossed the room to where the native woman lay on the floor struggling with her bonds.

Leah regarded her for a moment, then bent and slapped the brown cheek—only once, but hard.

"That seems cruel, doesn't it, Herbert?" she said, raising a pair of flashing eyes to him, "but I had to, just *had* to. I'll tell you all about her some day—the cat. Now somebody, please, lift me through the window, or I'll slap her again."

In a moment the lithe little form was safely in the boat with Mindoo, and Wally was spinning in mid-air, and an idiotic little hat, perfectly round, with a green button on the top, was gaily floating away down the stream.

Herbert was the next to drop into the boat; he did so hurriedly, for a knot halfway up the rope slipped and parted. They looked up and saw Dockerty, his body half through the window, turn and fire his revolver back into the room. Another shot, and another, then he dived, striking the water gracefully within a yard of them, and was helped spluttering into the boat. As Mindoo bent to the oars,

the face of old Sitagama appeared at the broken fourth window. On his venerable white beard was an ugly stain. A scimitar was thrown, but the boat was speeding down with the stream, out of danger, and Herbert let his eyes rest on the loved form beside him.

Now that the excitement of the escape was over, he saw the change in Leah Woolf. The eyes, beautiful as ever, shone a shade less brilliantly, and spoke of fatigue and anxious days and nights. Her cheeks, too, had lost their roundness, and as Herbert gazed, his love for her was very tender.

He cared not a bit for the presence of the others, but took her to him, folding her close in his arms, his lips brushing her forehead. In a little while she was sleeping like a child.

Then the Honourable Herbert raised his head and saw that Mindoo had been speaking to him.

"——and so we are safe from that quarter," the native was saying.

"I beg your pardon, Mindoo—how? I'm afraid I wasn't listening."

"I was saying that I had sunk all the oars from the other boats. As old Sinha is away, most of the pleasure boats are pulled up on

shore for overhauling. I have made those left in the water useless. Also the skippers are tearfully drunk."

"Good, Mindoo—you think of everything. Can you put us ashore soon?"

For answer the native pointed to a small boathouse on the northern bank.

"We must lie there all day—at night we will go to Itmad's,—it will not be safe before."

And with that the party had to be content. Leah woke, much refreshed, after a couple of hours' sleep. She told them of her adventures, and grew white when she spoke of the attack in the jungle. Apart from the horror of that time she had been treated well. Chunder had been perfectly courteous, and had considered her wants in every possible particular.

Sitagama, too, and the guards at the Palace had been irreproachable in their conduct, only the old gentleman seemed to think that she should have been grateful rather than show any resentment at being at the Palace.

Herbert asked her about the brown lady whom she had smacked.

"Oh! I can afford to laugh now, but she was very rude to me. That was Rama, the

principal wife of old Sinha. She called on me, as it were, and said nasty, spiteful things—just like women do at home. I'm glad I got back on her—the hussy."

Only when Mindoo had left to get food and drink, and Eddie and Wally were dozing in the bows of the boat, did the poor girl speak of her father.

"It is horrible, Herbert, to think of him lying out there, out in the great silence—alone with his God."

"Hush, dearest, I—I—have read your little writings in your book, and I see that you know what I have known for some time. We will think of him only as having loved you—of his tenderness to his little girl."

"He did love me, didn't he, Herbert?—that's what makes it so hard. I feel I want to ask his forgiveness for—knowing."

"We know nothing, we *will* know nothing. But we will remember, dear,—and forget."

. . . . .

On Mindoo's return the party picnicked with what gaiety they could muster. Strange to say, Wally came to the rescue of their drooping spirits in a truly wonderful manner.

He again became the clever comedian who had made a success of Herbert's little play, and even Leah could not be altogether sad, but took her cue from Herbert.

As darkness fell Mindoo peered cautiously out from the boathouse, then taking the oars he guided them carefully out over the dark river.

Wally leant over the stern, idly trailing his hand in the water. Suddenly he drew it in with a little comic cry of delight. He held up a sodden object—an idiotic little hat, perfectly round, with a green button on the top.

"I wouldn't have lost it for the world," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GRAVE IN THE JUNGLE

FOR three days they lay low at Itmad's house, in order that the hue and cry, that they felt sure was out for them, should die down. Their fears were quite unnecessary.

It was the useful Mindoo who, at the end of that time, brought them the news that the way was perfectly safe, having learnt from a friend at the Palace what had really happened there after their departure. It was distinctly funny.

Sitagama, who, it appears, had been slightly wounded on the cheek, was in a raging state of anger at the indignity to which he had been put, to say nothing of the falling through of his pretty little plan to win back Sinha's favour. He immediately issued orders that the fugitives should be followed, and brought back at all costs—alive or dead. In the meantime he would think out a few tortures.

Owing, however, to Mindoo's foresight in the matter of the oars, there was considerable delay in carrying out the old man's commands; in fact, the boats never set out at all, it being discovered that Sitagama, before he could give any further instructions, had been carried to his room in a fainting fit, there to remain, *hors de combat*, for the rest of the day, raving incoherently and babbling something about 'dogs.'

Then Rama seems to have got to work in her own way. It did not suit her book at all that the beautiful white girl should be brought back to the Palace, an event which would, in all probability, mean a lessening of her power over her royal spouse. The lady had reached that age when she knew that her reign could not last for ever, and she did not intend to hurry on the inevitable by any action of hers.

No sooner had the Vizier been carried away than she set about countermanding the orders he had given, issuing new ones in their place to the effect that the fact of the white devil's presence in the Palace at all should be kept secret. She knew that Sitagama, now that the bird had flown, would, for his own

sake, keep a still tongue in his head. The window was hastily mended and restored to its original shape, and all traces of the little fight removed. One unfortunate black attendant, whose arm had provided the billet for one of Eddie's bullets, alone remained as awkward evidence, and him Rama caused to be killed and disposed of secretly. The rest of those who knew anything of what had taken place feared the queen far too much to notify the Rajah of the merry times that he had missed.

For those in Itmad's pleasant little house the days passed blithely enough. From the roof and the windows they watched the lazy life of the city flowing in and out of its noble arcades and narrow alley-ways.

On the evening of the third day they discussed ways and means. On one point Leah was adamant, that they should return to the scene of the tragedy in the jungle and give her father burial, after which she would return to England as soon as might be. As for the "Moon of Valleys," she had done with that for ever. She expressed her wish to get in touch with Reuben's solicitor as soon as possible with a view to distributing such

property as he had died possessed of among certain charities. The two hundred a year left to her by her mother would suffice for her future needs.

Herbert upheld her in all matters. He, too, was heartily glad to abandon the search for the emerald, and was fully as anxious to leave the island as she was. Besides, as he told Leah with a laugh, there were no clergymen this side of Colombo, and if they didn't make tracks for that place pretty quickly, he would insist on a Buddhist priest performing the ceremony.

Wally Burns received the news of their approaching departure with somewhat mixed feelings. Anxious as he was to return to the joys of his beloved Strand, the thought of Mr Bradshaw was as a cold clutch upon his heart. He knew that Epgrave's first move would be to look up the old solicitor, and then the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance, and Herbert would, not unnaturally, want to know the reason for the actor's little trip to Paran, and this time would make sure that the explanation was the right one. Taking everything into consideration, things did not look any too rosy for Mr Wally Burns.

It was Dockerty who showed the little actor a way out. The two men had been sitting up later than the others over a final *bhang*, and had been discussing the flat stone that they had brought from Dharma's death-cave.

As he sat smoking and gazing absently at this object something struck the little man, awakening some chord in his memory, some elusive thread of his recent wanderings. He leant eagerly forward and drew the stone to him, looking long and thoughtfully at it. Surely the tree that had been depicted upon the flat surface was of a curious, and what is more, a familiar shape. Where had he seen one like it ?

His mind carried back to those never-to-be-forgotten days when he had tramped through the loathsome jungle. It had then been his business to note the shape of certain trees, with a view to possible lodgings. Yes, he was sure that somewhere back in those dark forests he had stood before such a tree, sizing up its apartmental possibilities. Whether he had ultimately slept in it or not, he could not now remember, neither could he locate its position, beyond that it was within two

days of when he fell from the broken branch of the bo-tree.

In a few words he told Eddie all about it, and into the latter's eyes came a new light. Herbert and Leah could do as they liked about the emerald—with him it was different. The 'Moon' might be endowed with all the curses of the East, he didn't mind risking them all.

A plan by which he could take on the search presented itself to him, but for its successful carrying out he must have the services of Wally. Moreover, it was to be done secretly. He was sick of the sight of Leah and Herbert together, and welcomed the excitement of the 'Moon'-hunt as a way out of his depressing surroundings.

Wally, too, when it was told him, saw the chance of dodging *his* difficulties, and agreed to Dockerty's proposals eagerly. Far into the night the two men sat making their plans, elaborating and discussing, and when at last Wally threw himself upon his divan, it was to dream that he was a bent and very aged man, whose long white beard, encrusted with emeralds, reached to the ground, and that he was walking—walking, always, through juicy

undergrowth and beneath ropes of gorgeous creepers,—and always round a mountain.

. . . . .

It was early morning, and Leah and her lover leant over the parapet of Itmad's roof taking their farewell of Talabo. The morning sun cast his splendour over the city, painting in delicate hues the dainty minarets and cupolas of the Palace. From a flag-staff over the great central dome a yellow and white flag floated languidly in the faint breeze.

In the courtyard below them a large bullock cart was in readiness to take them as far as possible on their journey. After that they must proceed on foot, with the exception of Leah, for whom a litter had been provided, together with a native bearer to supplement Mindoo. As the latter came to summon them from the roof his eyes fell upon the yellow and white flag. He laughed shortly as he pointed to it.

"A sign of royal occupation—Sinha has tired of his hunting—we were none too soon."

Eddie and Wally showed neither by word nor look that they had discussed anything out of the ordinary the night before. The actor

wore his little hat perched jauntily on one side of his head, and he whistled gaily as he sat on the tail-board of the cart. Eddie, too, seemed to have thrown off his gloominess and chatted brightly with Leah and Herbert, as they made themselves as comfortable as possible in the jolting vehicle.

And in this way they took their departure almost unnoticed at that early hour, from the royal and ancient capital of the island of Paran.

Away through the southern gate and up the long, winding road fringed with its mango groves, its cocoa plantations and paddy fields. At first a few isolated bungalows, then desolation and the endless jungle.

It was late afternoon when they reluctantly had to give up all further thought of the road, which had now degenerated into little more than a track. It was decided to make use of the wagon as a resting-place for Leah that night, the men taking it in turns to sleep beneath it, and in the morning following they bade a kindly farewell to their very good friend, Itmad, and to little Nata.

The dignified old fellow cut short their thanks with a smile. It had given him great

pleasure, he assured them, to be the host of men from the land of the Great White King. It would be something to remember—to tell his grandchildren—to talk of for evermore. But there were tears in the gentle eyes of his daughter as she shyly took their hands, and her expression as she looked her farewell into Eddie's blue eyes was one that it would not be good for her military lover to see. But Eddie's eyes were the eyes that women like to look into—mischievous, merry eyes into which the dark shadows were seldom allowed to creep—but when they did women were glad to look away.

The little group stood by the edge of the jungle and watched until the cart had jolted away out of sight. At the last bend Itmad rose in his driver's seat and waved his leather whip, but little Nata did not look back.

Then the party set briskly forward, and made good progress, for they camped next quite close to the scene of the tragedy. They did not tell Leah, and before the sun had risen Eddie and Herbert quietly left the camp, taking with them a spade which they had bought in Talabo, and carried hidden in the folds of the litter, unsuspected by its occu-

pant. They were back before the girl was awake, and breakfast was cooked when she at last emerged from the tent that had been constructed for her out of the materials of the litter.

And then Herbert suggested a little stroll with her, and, all unsuspecting, she agreed. He led her through the sparse jungle, and halting before a gorgeous rhododendron bush he placed a hand on her arm.

"I am going to wait about here, dearest," he said. "I want you to walk on a little way —you will know——"

He turned without another word and walked slowly back in the direction of the camp.

Leah stood a moment, her eyes resting on the back of her lover, then, as he had asked her to, she walked on. In a moment she understood.

Beyond the bush was a narrow strip of raised earth, and at the head a boulder, on which was rudely scratched:

REUBEN WOOLF

R.I.P.

. . . . .

Ten minutes passed and Epgrave grew anxious. Fifteen minutes—twenty—and he peeped cautiously round the cluster of bush, and a lump rose in his throat as he looked.

He never forgot the scene: the fresh morning light, the murmur of the jungle, the vivid blossoms of the rhododendrons, and the slim figure of the kneeling girl, alone with the dead.

He turned away, and resumed his pacing up and down.

She came to him in a little while and said no word as she took his arm, only bent a little and kissed his sleeve. There were traces of tears in the lovely eyes, and a little bunch of white blossoms that Herbert had put beside her plate at breakfast were no longer in her belt.

Once or twice she looked back as they returned to the camp. An hour later they were making tracks, under Mindoo's guidance, for van Bol's bungalow.

CHAPTER XXIV

LEAH'S DIARY

I HAD taken up my little book again with a view of recording something of my imprisonment, but I have turned back the pages, and I see that my husband has forestalled me, and told practically all there is to be told. I could fill a page or two describing my feelings as I sat in that little house facing the river at Talabo ; I could tell of Chunder's comparative courtesy to me, but I don't see why I should now do so. I want to forget that time as much as I can.

My husband—how strange it is to think that I who was plain Leah Woolf can now style myself the Honourable Mrs Epgrave.

Surely girl never had a more romantic wedding than mine, and I would far rather write of that than of those horrible days in Talabo. It took place in the quaint kitchen of this charming old Dutch homestead

among the rice fields. I will try and set down as well I can how it all came about.

We had finished supper one night and the talk had turned as to how long it would be before we reached London. We had almost forgotten that the boats to Colombo were so few and far between, and it came as a shock to us when van Bol told us that we must, at least, spend two months with him. We protested, saying that we would go to the hotel at Sinha-dam, but the worthy old Dutchman would have none of it. He's such a dear.

The talk had somehow drifted on to the marriage that was to take place at the English church in Colombo when we arrived, and perhaps my happiness was mirrored in my face—I distinctly saw *his* in Herbert's dear old eyes.

And then our host propounded a truly amazing scheme. It appears he knew of a missionary of the Dutch Church who was sowing the good seed among the rather unsatisfactory material down at the coast town. Of course, the inference was obvious to us all, and—well, there—the priest was invited to the bungalow.

He was a charming old man, and although

Mynheer van Bol had to act as interpreter, the ceremony was altogether impressive. The dear old Dutchman himself gave me away, and the ring was one that Herbert had always worn on his little finger, a plain gold circlet, with the Epgrave arms engraved on a little shield. He wants to change it for another when we get to London, but I don't think I will let him.

I can see the scene so plainly, although it is now six happy weeks ago. The spotless kitchen, with its tiled floor and shining brass, the aged and gentle missionary, and before him, kneeling on hassocks, my dear husband and myself, van Bol, his genial old face suffused with good humour, behind us, with his old vrou, weeping as women always will at weddings. I cried a little myself. Then there were Mr Dockerty and Mr Burns. I remember that the expression of comic solemnity on the face of the latter made me laugh when the ceremony was over.

And then the breakfast, laid out on the verandah, for the morning was very mild. It seemed as if every coolie on the estate had sent his contribution to honour his master's guests, and the country around had yielded

up its finest fare of fish, flesh, and fowl for the occasion.

A general holiday was proclaimed on the plantation, and I can still hear the weird and wonderful serenade that greeted us after the day of rejoicing was at an end and the tropic night had fallen. The best I can say for the music was that it was well-meant, and played with an astounding vigour. There was absolutely no *tune* whatever. About ten of the natives lined up under our window and sang us a song in Cingalese. Herbert told me it was a love song; I took his word for it, but it sounded remarkably like a dirge. The men danced as well, uttering weird cries and threading in and out, bearing torches,—there seemed millions of them—which glittered like fireflies in the scented darkness. The effect was bizarre in the extreme.

Truly a wedding such as few girls can boast of, and surely never was honeymoon spent in more perfect surroundings. Our host has been untiring throughout in his efforts, and has arranged picnics and shooting parties almost every day.

And now we must leave it all, for to-morrow will see us on the way to the coast—and Eng-

land. I do not know whether I am sorry or glad to leave here : I sometimes wonder how the Earl, who refuses to recognise the son, will deal with that son's wife.

——There's my dear man below. I can hear him asking where I am. I've only written a scrappy little bit, but I seem to be so busy. I'll stick to it better when we get on the boat—perhaps.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DESERTERS

IT was the first morning after their departure from the bungalow when Herbert rose, stretched himself, and looked around. Leah was still sleeping, but where was the breakfast? He and Mindoo had taken first watch, and Eddie and Wally had not come on until an hour or two before daybreak. And now they were off somewhere and there was no breakfast.

The Honourable Herbert Epgrave's eyes made a tour of the little camp. He was desperately hungry. It was too bad of the others not to have even got the water hot. The fire, too, had burned very low, and had evidently not been mended for some considerable time. He would have shouted, but feared to wake his wife, so instead he set about collecting sticks with which to coax the fire into a serviceable condition. This

done, he unearthed the kettle, filled it and set it to boil, then—the frying-pan next and have it ready for——

Herbert stopped and gazed blankly at that useful utensil, the cigarette he had just lighted hanging from his drooping underlip, for there, staring at him from the pan and evidently put there so that it should not miss his eye, was an envelope addressed to himself.

He turned it over and over in his hand, as though estimating its contents, then he sat down, tore it open, and drew out two closely written pages in Eddie's clear handwriting.

Herbert lifted a piece of live wood from the fire and lit the cigarette that had gone out. Then he read.

Word for word he went through it, his expression never changing, beyond the lift of an eyebrow or a curl of the lip.

After he had finished, he sat gazing into the fire and at the singing kettle, the letter hanging limply between his knees. Leah came from the tent and took it from his hand.

In a moment he had recovered it and, " I'd rather read it to you," he said. " It's from Eddie. Funny to have a morning delivery

of letters here in the jungle, isn't it? Now don't interrupt me till I've read it all."

He began:

My dear Herbert,—I wonder what you will think of me after you have read this good-bye to you both. You must have guessed my secret—how there was only one way whereby I could turn over a new leaf and start a fresh life, and that way you have taken from me.

I don't blame you, it's the fortune of war; but I DO *tell you that had I not seen how much Leah and you are to each other I would have shirked no method of winning what I wanted. But any dreams I may have had in that direction were knocked on the head, once and for all, that day in old van Bol's kitchen.*

But, Herbert, my boy, I cannot face the going home in your company, where every look, every word, is a stab. I think we used to call it "playing the gooseberry" when I was a boy, so I'm just dropping out of your lives. There is no place for me in them now, and never can be. You would always feel that you must be nice to "good old Eddie" after going through so much together here, and I couldn't stand THAT.

Fancy, when you come into the title, know-

ing ME—*why, man, I'm known to the police of two continents. So you see what I mean.*

I'm going back for the "Moon of Valleys." I came out for it, and I don't often fail in anything so long as it's crooked. If I try anything honest, I go down every time.

Wally is coming with me. He will be useful in a way that I have not time to go into in this letter; but it's in connection with that stone we found in the cave. I've taken the copy of the chart as well, but I fancy that only refers to Dharma's tomb. The stone does the rest, I think. I guess Chunder won't get much change out of his map, now.

You won't be surprised when you remember how I have been 'swotting' at the language of this old island lately. I have worked at it hours each night and can get on with it pretty well now. . . .

Then, again, there's Chunder. I want to get at grips with him. You see, Reuben was my pal. . . .

Love is not for me, but there are other things in life ALMOST *as good. One of them is getting your enemy's throat between your fingers.*

I hope you'll be happy—but there, I've seen you together, and I know you will.

Yours,

Eddie Dockerty.

Leah was silent for a moment as her husband folded up the document and put it in his pocket. Then :

" Poor Eddie," she said, with a little halting laugh.

" Not a bad sort, eh, Leah ? Perhaps it is all for the best that he's gone. It's quite right what he says ; we could never have been anything but friendly to him. I'm thinking, dear, of when we get back to England—it's so different here."

Leah nodded and sat still, gazing at the fire. The kettle was boiling merrily, and she took it off and set it on the ground beside her. Herbert got up and began to brew the tea.

" Yes, I can understand Eddie wanting to have his bad half-hour alone, but that doesn't account for Wally. I thought *he'd* have stuck to me, anyway."

Mindoo had been a silent spectator of the scene since he had opened his eyes and rolled out of his blanket. Now he, too, busied himself with the preparation of the morning meal, turning his eyes from master to mistress as though inviting their confidence.

He knew that something had happened, and could only connect it with the absence

of the others. He took his breakfast near them, and during the meal Herbert told him as much of the matter as he thought necessary.

The native seemed rather pleased than otherwise. With the instinct of his race he had taken stock of the *caste*, as it were, of the men, singling out Epgrave as quite apart from the others. Leah he did not trouble about; she was a woman, and to him quite unimportant. She was beautiful, and really that was all that mattered. He felt glad that it was Herbert who was left as the one to whom to look for payment when he got back to Colombo instead of Eddie. Wally had never interested him in the least.

In fact, they all took the affair quite calmly and struck camp immediately after breakfast. Even had they wished to follow the deserters, it would have been like looking for the proverbial needle, and so they made the best of their way coastward, arriving at Sinha-dam on the evening of the second day and putting up at the little hotel facing the quay, to the proprietor of which van Bol had given them a letter, as well as to Mynheer van Weert, the Resident.

It was the first time that they had been in the little coast town, and, as was the case when Chunder and Wally stayed there, it was awaking into the brief week of life that synchronised with the coming of the Colombo boat.

On the morning after their arrival Herbert was taking the air in the little courtyard in company with the genial old Resident. Leah, looking down upon them from a balcony, noted that the latter was already, at this early hour, devoting himself to Schnapps. He was speaking in Cingalese, so she was at a loss to know what it was that made her husband start so and eagerly question the old Dutchman.

"Yes," the latter was saying, "the man you speak of as Chunder stayed here—yes, in this very hotel. I used to see him with my own eyes with his little friend. But they spoke in English—a language, alas! I do not speak."

"What was he like—I mean this little friend you speak of?"

"Ah, the little friend—yes. He came here a native, but he grew less and less like one every day. I saw the top of his head one

day : it was getting white. But there, I was busy, I did not trouble, and one day they disappeared."

"He was a very small man ?" queried Herbert.

"Ach ! so, so, Mr Epgrave." The Resident himself was a little tub of a man, and viewed his fellows from a different standpoint to the Honourable Herbert.

Then he finished up his Schnapps and trotted off to his little office on the quay, leaving his companion something to think on.

"It *was* rather a tall story the little rotter told me when we met on the cliff, but I believed it. Wally Burns, no wonder you didn't want to come back to London with me."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FURTHER TREACHERY OF WALLY BURNS

THE search for the all-important tree, the discovery of which meant so much to the deserters, proved a fairly easy matter. The pair spent a few weeks in Sinha-dam, entering the town after they were sure that the boat had left, devoting themselves to a further study of the language and to the procuring of a guide.

Of the latter quest they soon wearied. The inhabitants of Sinha-dam all seemed to hold lucrative positions, and to a man they lacked all suggestion of effort and initiative. One and all, they held out their hands and shrugged their shoulders.

Certainly, one man applied for the job in person at the hotel, but as Wally recognised in him the fellow who had made off with his luggage and that of Mr Chunder on his previous *trek*, it is not necessary to describe his reception and ultimate retreat.

In about three weeks the men started out alone. It was easy to trace the way to the spot where Wally had left Chunder on his bed of fever, but from that point things grew more difficult. True, the fact that Wally's had been the first foot to break through these primeval jungles helped them considerably. He had left in places a trail that showed on the undergrowth, like a rabbit run in our woods at home, then the track would disappear altogether, only to be caught up again after hours, and sometimes days, of searching. It occurred to them more than once that they had been wiser to have made for Dharma's cave and worked back from there, but this suggestion, which came from Eddie, came too late to act upon.

It was the thirty-ninth day after the boat had left Sinha-dam that, at last, they stood before the object of their search. Wally knew it was this date, for he had kept strict account, snicking the enamel from each minute mark on his watch-face as each day passed. Happen what might he had resolved that the steamer he had watched dipping below the southern horizon should be the last that left the island without him, and the next boat would depart

when his calendar had travelled an hour and a half, or ninety days.

There was no mistaking the tree—there could not be two like it in Paran, and so there was but little doubt that the sketch on the stone had some significance. The background of hills, too, was faithfully depicted. Of the marks and dots that surrounded the sketch they could make nothing.

And then ensued some weeks of real work, labour in all its grim reality. From early morn until the sun sank the two men toiled with spade and pick, giving every inch of the ground surrounding the tree their minutest inspection. Methodically they measured out the scene of their workings, and as methodically examined each scrap of the earth disturbed.

But it was all to no purpose until Wally, late one afternoon, struck hard on some substance that sent a shiver up the handle of his pick.

Cautiously he glanced over his shoulder; Eddie was busy digging some twenty yards from him, his back towards him.

Wally knelt and tore away at the undergrowth with quiet but feverish energy.

Great beads of cold perspiration started from his brow as he turned from time to time to watch his companion.

Little by little he tore away the creepers, exposing what appeared to be a slab of grey marble, and then his fingers took hold of a ring of metal. A cry from Eddie caused his body to stiffen. He hastily threw back the earth and leaves he had disturbed and went over and stood leaning on his pick beside his fellow-worker.

The latter looked up.

"You're a bit white, Wally—tired, eh?"

"Tired to death, Dockerty. I must let up on this if we don't strike something soon."

For answer Eddie bent down and picked up a small object which he held out to the little actor.

"A bone of some sort, whether human or not I can't guess."

Wally took it and turned it over and over in his hand. He was apparently examining it, but in reality he hardly saw it at all. He was thinking rapidly and clearly. At last he saw the means of getting even with all those who had brought him away from his beloved Strand to this distressful country.

"This looks well, Eddie," he said. "D-don't you t-think we had b-better follow it up—I mean, hadn't we better work on *this* side of the tree — of course, it's merely a suggestion——"

"Not a bad one either, Wally; your side doesn't seem to turn up many trumps. Now, we'll knock off and get at it again early."

As a rule both men slept the sleep of utter exhaustion. On this night, however, one of them had other plans. While Eddie slept the little man toiled alone in the moonlight, working feverishly at the crevices around the slab of marble. It was quite a small affair, and once the creepers were removed the lifting of it was well within his unaided strength—and then——

Wally could hardly restrain the cry of admiration as the white rays of the moon leapt joyously into the little hole in the earth, and played merrily among the treasures clustered there. That mass of living green in the little gold saucer could be nothing less than the wonderful "*Moon of Valleys.*" It was throwing out its rays as though in ecstasy at its release from its long imprisonment.

There could be no question that as far as Wally was concerned the quest was at an end. The green rays seemed to leap up at him, they spoke to him, and he nodded back and thought that he was going mad.

He put out a hand that trembled, and, with a muttered 'ah,' picked up the gem; to his excited senses it seemed to burn a hole through his clammy palm. As he slipped it inside his shirt it seemed to answer back, throb by throb, his heart.

There were other jewels there as well, rubies, sapphires, and a few medium-sized diamonds; these he wrapped in a large leaf and put with the emerald. Then for another hour he toiled, destroying all traces of the cavity in the earth, making it look like the surrounding ground that his pick had disturbed.

How deeply Eddie Dockerty slept! Wally felt a little stab of compunction as he watched the calmly smiling face.

He lifted the slab and carried it away, back into the dense jungle as far as he dared go. For ten minutes he walked, and then he hurled it into a large tangle of bush through which he thought he could detect the glint

of the moon on water. He was rewarded by the dull *plonk* that reached his ears.

Half an hour afterwards he was sleeping no less soundly than Eddie Dockerty.

The next day the men worked hard at the spot where the bone had been turned up—and the next day—and the next. Then came Wally's chance. Eddie had suggested that he should spend the following day with his gun. Their larder had become lamentably low, and a day's sport appealed to him as a welcome change from the spade-work. Wally was quite agreeable, but said he preferred to rest; besides, he couldn't hit anything if he *did* come.

For an hour the actor waited, listening to the shots from Eddie's gun, until they told him that the sportsman was far enough away for his purpose. He then prepared his little ruse.

He took the jewels from the hiding-place he had found for them in the fork of a tree some hundred yards into the jungle, and secured them again inside his shirt.

A few moments after, the whole camp was as though a herd of buffaloes had swept across it. The tent was dragged down and the spades and picks and the cooking utensils

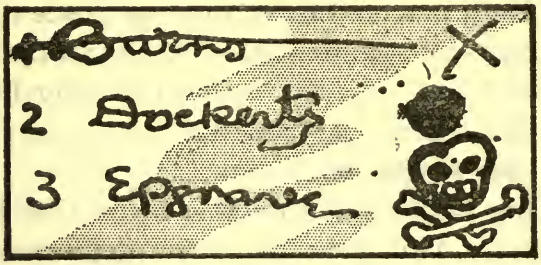
scattered in all directions. The little table and all it contained were overthrown and stamped upon by the little actor.

Then he took off his coat, ripping open the sleeve and tearing off one or two of the buttons. He also stabbed the breast of the garment in two places with his hunting-knife, decorating the spot with a few splashes of blood, procured from a cut he plucked up courage enough to make in his arm. He allowed the red fluid to drop in ugly little patches where they would be easily seen by any one visiting the camp.

Fifty yards away there was an overhanging precipice, falling sheer to the valley beneath, a distance of some hundred feet, and towards this Wally dragged himself. Lying flat upon his stomach he tugged a passage through the undergrowth, leaving a trail that could hardly fail, together with the blood-stained coat and the general disorder, to convey an impression of dire tragedy and sudden death.

At the extreme edge of the cliff he beat the ground down in a circle intended to denote the final struggle, and left another button in a conspicuous position on a large leaf. Then, well satisfied, he walked back.

Among the odds and ends in his pocket that he had accumulated since first meeting Chunder at the docks was one of that worthy's visiting cards. This he carefully placed in the centre of the devastated camp, after writing on the back of it with a stick and a little more blood.



Then Wally looked at the little bag containing their stock of money and hesitated, but not for long. He told himself that from first to last he had been forced into the situation, and that it was up to him to emerge with all the honours and benefits that he could. So he took the lot—a sum more than sufficient to see him through to London. He knew that it would be highly unwise and unsafe to try and dispose of the jewels in Ceylon. He had heard enough talk of stones with histories

to make him very wary as to which quarter he looked to for a sale.

He gave a hurried and final glance round the wrecked camp. Surely he had done enough to prevent Eddie following him; he would surely look upon the little actor as dead, and knowing Eddie's character, he felt, with a pang of remorse, that the man would hunt Chunder down, and possibly kill him. Well, he could, for all Wally cared. He told himself he had done with the whole thing.

The journey to the coast was a simple matter now, and Wally seemed to know every inch of the way. Also, experience had bred contempt of the terrors of the jungle. Arriving at Sinha-dam, he awaited with what patience he could the coming of the Ceylon boat, keeping well out of sight and a vigilant eye the while for the possible re-appearance of Eddie. He felt that this same boat might exercise a like fascination over Dockerty as it did over himself. Then Wally would have to lie low until the next.

But luck was with the little man in the shape of a small schooner on its way to Calcutta which was forced to put into Sinha-dam on account of a shortage of fresh water,

and it was an easy matter for the actor to buy a passage. Perhaps, after all, it was just as well to miss Colombo altogether.

And so, one bright and sunny morning, Wally Burns sat at the taffrail of the *Rhatta* and watched the rocky northern shore of Paran drop below the horizon.

He bowed to it ironically, one hand on his heart, over the "*Moon of Valleys*," while with the other he waved an idiotic little hat, perfectly round, with a green button on the top.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE 'ROTTER'

FOR two whole days Wally enjoyed the gratifying sensations of unexpected wealth. He had been so exercised, during his travels, over his personal safety that the idea of his coming out 'top dog' had never entered his mind, and the pleasure was all the keener. He had all the feelings of a man who, having backed a fifty-to-one winner with a doubtful penciller, had received payment in full.

For these two days he was well content to sit on board watching the changing ocean, lost in pleasurable anticipation; then the desire for companionship drove him into the society of the only man on board who could speak English.

It would have puzzled an expert sailorman to say to what rank Harri belonged on board the *Rhatta*. To Wally he seemed to be purser,

mate, and carpenter by turns, and to be always doing something with a rope. His uniform, such as it was, was of blue serge, upon which the tarnished gold braid was somewhat discounted by the turban of maroon silk in which Harri's head was invariably swathed. His face was swarthy and deeply bronzed by many summers of the Indian seas, and in his ears gleamed little rings of thin gold.

His English was halting, not broken, and told more of a man to whom his mother tongue had long been a stranger. At times curious little intonations would creep into his speech, echoes of a past culture which refused to be disguised. He told Wally that he was born in Somerset, but that he was a 'rotter.'

In the little deck-room in which Harri kept his chest and had his bunk, Wally passed many a pleasant hour with his new friend. There they would sit and talk of the old country, steeping themselves in *arrack*, the potency of which loosened the actor's tongue, so that he found himself confiding many things that in his more sober moments he would have left unsaid.

A curious little room it was, and from it Wally deduced much of the tragedy of its owner. From the little bookshelf that hung just above the bunk he picked up a volume of a novel that had been popular twenty years back. Still adhering to its faded cover were the discoloured remains of a Mudie's label. On the wall, framed in narrow oak, was a certificate blazoning forth, amidst mildewed stains, the glorious fact that (the name had been erased) had passed some examination at a Yeovil grammar school. —A 'rotter'—yes, Wally understood, and when next he saw Harri he looked with a keener interest at the hopelessness of the lined, aristocratic face, wondering what it was that had sent this man forth from his home to become a human derelict, a wanderer in Eastern seas.

It was not until that autocrat of the Port Office, the Hughli pilot, had taken possession of the *Rhatta,* and Harri's release from responsibility had prompted a more than usually prolonged bout of drinking, that Wally showed him the "Moon of Valleys." The little actor was far too much in liquor to notice the look that came into the 'rotter's'

eyes as they rested upon the verdant glories of the stone, but in the morning it came back to him with an unpleasant shock. He remembered, too, that Harri had advised him to hide it away quickly, and had adroitly changed the subject by pointing out to him the "Sunderbunds" which they were passing, telling him the legend, how that the masses of sand, covered with the coarse, rank jungle grass, harboured the departed spirits of the sepoys who had fallen in the Mutiny, and how crocodiles and many other loathsome beasts infested the region, living on the refuse and tragedies of the great city above them. He had pointed out the half-immersed body of a native woman floating within a few yards of the ship.

But with the morning also came the bustle of the docking of the *Rhatta*, and Harri's manner disarmed any suspicions the actor may have formed. He found himself arm-in-arm with his friend—he was ashore, and that was all that mattered.

It was not his beloved Strand certainly, but it was good enough. The whitewashed bungalows on the Bundh, with their attendant crowd of half-drunken sailormen, promised

refreshment. The bamboo benches before them drew Wally, under the circumstances, with as much force as the plush-covered settees of a Maiden Lane saloon. His fears of the early morning were for the moment lulled, and, with Harri, he was soon in the thick of it.

As the two men made their way along the crowded Bundh the sailor mentioned the fact that business in connection with his ship would claim him until the evening, when he would be at Wally's disposal. The regret that the little actor expressed at this was not altogether genuine.

Ever since he had set eyes on the city Wally had been casting about for a means whereby he could shake off the rather unwelcome attentions of his newly found friend and take up the position to which he considered his riches entitled him. It had been all very well on board the *Rhatta*, but it was different now. And now Harri himself had furnished the very excuse he had been seeking.

Nothing easier than to promise to meet the man and then conveniently forget all about it. It was hardly likely that Harri would

search him out in the fashionable fastnesses to which the actor was anxious to make his way.

And so a rendezvous was arranged, and the two men parted with many anticipatory remarks as to the evening's pleasure. Wally stood and watched the rolling walk of the sailorman until the tall figure disappeared in the direction of the docks. Then he breathed a large sigh of relief, and pressed the package containing the ' Moon ' lovingly to his side.

His immediate plans were already well defined in his mind. First, he enquired the direction of the Great Eastern Hotel, from which centre he visited in turn a good-class outfitter, a barber, and a jeweller. The latter spent the rest of the day in celebration and in calling down intense blessings on the sahib who, for the sum of thirty English pounds, was willing to part with a ruby worth two hundred.

But Wally was not in the mood to haggle. He did not miss the little blood-red stone, and was well content to sit in the comfortable chairs of the " Great Eastern " smoking-room, well dressed and sipping real Scotch

whisky. If the jeweller was pleased, the actor was no less so.

As he gazed from the windows at the ever-changing life of Calcutta he told himself that it was all very interesting indeed, but that he was about sick of the East, anyway; his whole idea now was to leave its garish colour and its evil smells and make tracks for home.

But Fate willed it that he should make a natural but unfortunate move that same afternoon. Natural, in that he went forth in search of shipping offices with a view to a passage home; unfortunate, in that he should, at the corner of Lal Bazar, run across the very man he wished to avoid.

Harri in shore clothes was a truly magnificent sight. A complete suit of pilot cloth hung like boards on his massive frame; a hard felt hat crowned his head, coming well down over his brows; a muffler of salmon-pink accentuated the swarthiness of his skin; and the little gold rings in his ears gave a curiously barbaric aspect to the whole.

The afore-mentioned massive frame was doubtless the reason of Wally's remark that he was on his way to keep the appointment made in the morning. If Harri doubted him

he was careful not to show it, and Wally, ever weak where liquid refreshment was concerned, found himself in a short time slipping into a congenial evening, such as in his saner moments he would have deemed very foolish.

But he did not really enjoy it; he was not at all at his ease in the haunts to which his seafaring friend escorted him. He had no moral scruples, but he felt that his wealth entitled him to better things. For the first hour or so he was, perhaps, mildly interested, but as the night progressed his whole thought was to get back to the cosy comfort of the "Great Eastern"—to civilisation. He wondered if it was friendship that caused Harri to link his arm so tightly in his as they made their way from place to place. He grew distinctly frightened, and the little parcel of gems seemed to burn a hole in his side. He brought all his craftiness to bear, as he saw signs that his guide was getting nearer and nearer to the neighbourhood of the docks. Harri was, at the same time, all that could be desired as a companion, and sometimes Wally would tell himself that he had misjudged the man.

But ever they were nearing the river; he

could make out the masts silhouetted against the moonlit sky, and could hear the murmur of the river life. He thought of the black water, of the half-immersed corpse of the native woman, and of the ghosts of the dead sepoys. He didn't quite know what a sepoy was, but there was no comfort to him in that. He felt that if he did not soon see the interior of his hotel he would go mad.

. . . . .

Fritz Dussellheim, known to sailormen 'from Mississip to Clyde' by the sobriquet of 'The Germ,' gazed idly from the portico of his lodging-house facing Garden Reach.

From the darkened room behind him came a confused murmur. A party of Finnish seamen were quietly conducting a never-ending quarrel over a game of cards in one corner, and, scattered about in little groups, other men of the deep lounged and smoked. A fair-bearded Dane was sharing some greasy chops with two heavy-browed Swedes; they had the dish containing the mess of fat-ringed meat on the table between them, and were helping themselves when and how they

chose. They were not dainty, and they smoked as they ate.

The old German grunted in disappointment as a party of seamen, after hesitating at his doorway, passed and entered 'Java Joe's' opposite. He seated himself behind the little bar and drew from his pocket an old and greasy copy of the *Zeitung*, and arranged a pair of huge circular glasses with difficulty on his little round button of a nose.

As one looked at him one wondered if his nickname of 'The Germ' was merely an abbreviation of his nationality, or whether it had a more offensive origin. Short and tubby in figure, his head, small and at no part appreciably broader than the neck that supported it, he was not at all unlike certain parasites when viewed through a microscope. His eyes, large and protruding, were dull yellow pools, in which the pupils floated about aimlessly. Set close together and surrounded by wrinkles and pendulous fat, they had the appearance of being kept in his head by the glasses in front of them. He was not a pretty sight.

For a time 'The Germ' read his paper, then his head drooped slowly at an angle that grew

more and more grotesque as the drink-laden atmosphere and the malodorous night air of Calcutta stole over him and claimed him.

When he awoke he turned and re-lit the lamp that swung over the bench by the window. From 'Java Joe's' came the sound of an accordion wheezing out an old-English ballad, and he ground his teeth as he heard the chorus to think of the business his rival was doing. At that moment Harri and Wally entered.

A look of understanding passed for a moment between the 'rotter' and the Teutonic host, then the latter turned away with an evil smile that crinkled and creased up his face most hideously. When Harri came to the 'hotel' with a stranger, it generally meant much profit to be cut up, and much tribulation to the stranger.

Wally's fears were not lessened by his surroundings. He was feeling far from sober, despite his heroic endeavours to preserve his wits. At the same time, those wits were somewhat sharpened by the spirit he had taken, and he decided on a ruse, drastic but necessary. He saw now only too plainly that to leave Harri was out of the question, and he

cast his eyes round for a spot that would suit a purpose he had in his mind.

He decided finally upon a dark corner of a shelf behind him, full of bottles and jars, the dust upon which plainly showed they were seldom disturbed. Awaiting his opportunity when 'The Germ' was engaged with his other customers, he slipped the little parcel behind an old Japanese ginger pot, and noted with satisfaction that his action was unperceived. Then with a lurch that was not altogether assumed, he slapped Harri on the back.

"It's all ri', old boy—how about bed?"

The 'rotter' pointed up the little rickety stair, and Wally went on.

"Is it shafe?"

'The Germ' came over and took a hand in the little game. "It vos safe—as you say—as 'ouses—yes."

Wally leered across at him, rubbing a grimy forefinger slily against the side of his nose.

"Safer in the old ship. I've got jewels there—rubies and emeralds—big as eggs. I'll sleep in the old ship—sounds like Brighton. What!—then I'll be near them—see?—near my beauties—all red and green—fire——"

"You mean—vot—vou haf chools—in der ship." The German looked at Harri questioningly. Wally was still rambling on.

"——no, I won't—I'll sleep here—old Harri'll fetch the jewels—rubies and emeralds and—I can't sleep without them—not me—"

"You told me coming up the river that you always carried them with you." It was the 'rotter' who spoke.

Wally rose uncertainly to his feet and held open his coat.

"You can search me. I hid them in the ship. I was going down to-morrow to get 'em—thought I might get 'canned' ashore—see? Go and fetch 'em, old man."

If Harri had suspected a ruse, Wally's actions effectually dispersed his doubts. As though in fun, he took the little man at his word and ran his fingers over him. There was certainly nothing concealed in his clothes, and, as Wally had carried no bag or parcel, Harri had no choice but to believe the story of the ship. He, too, got upon his feet and made for the door, Wally calling after him. "In my lil' bunk—under everything—you can't miss it—hurry up—emeralds and rubies—and—here, old Fatherland, another drink—

good old Harri—good pals all." Wally was really acting very well.

Left alone he pretended sleep. The German, who at first watched him carefully, soon ceased to take any particular notice of the huddled-up figure in the corner. The rest of the guests were intent on their quarrels or their games. From time to time Wally opened one eye,—he knew he had less than half an hour before Harri would find out he had been 'sold,' and he took stock of his surroundings. The time slowly passed, but no opportunity came to the waiting man, until, as a last resource, he was contemplating a rush, when a kind Providence gave him his chance by sowing dissension among a party of card-players at the far end of the room. 'The Germ' rose as the oaths rapped out through the foul atmosphere of the room, and waddled towards the scene of the disturbance, grunting out peevish protests.

This was all Wally had been waiting for. He cautiously stretched out an arm and regained possession of his treasure. Then, still unperceived, he slid out into the dark street. The place was fairly quiet now, the singing in 'Java Joe's' had died down to intermit-

tent bursts of cacophony, and the few revellers he met with took little notice of the Englishman.

The moon, that hung just above the bristling masts and spars on the Hughli, showed Wally the road clear before him—a way of black shadows and vivid patches of light. He proceeded carefully, choosing his path among the shadows and keeping close in to the houses.

From the direction of the river, and keeping, as far as it was able, to the centre of the road, came a figure, stumbling and swearing. Wally drew back into a dark doorway as Harri hurried by. He caught a glimpse of the evil face for a moment as the 'rotter' emerged into the moonlight, and he felt glad that he had left 'The Germ's' hospitable roof when he did.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A DEAL IN PRECIOUS STONES

THROUGH the night Wally blundered on in what he fondly hoped to be the direction of lighted streets and their comparative safety. Swathed figures, looking in the pale moonlight like ghosts in their winding sheets, shuffled by him from time to time, and now and again a ray of yellow light from a suddenly opened door would stab the gloom, and a woman would look out and perhaps mumble to him.

But there were always convenient shadows into which the terrified actor could retreat, and so with infinite care and many pauses he passed unmolested into the better parts of this "city of dreadful night." Gradually the tortuous alley-ways and tiny squares were left behind for wider streets in which prosperous-looking houses lay back in the shadow, cast by arc lamps, of lofty walls. In the

distance he could make out an electric tram. This cheered him up wonderfully.

The rest was easy, and within an hour of leaving his seafaring friend, Wally was safely beneath his mosquito net and behind double-locked doors—not sleeping, but studying a shipping list that he had borrowed from the hotel office—planning. He had but two ideas now, that of reaching London and of disposing of the 'Moon.' It was quite foreign to his nature and desires that he should be dodging in and out of evil-smelling Eastern cities with a package of jewels. In London, backed by the large banking account his treasure would give him, he would know better where he was, as it were. The thing that exercised him now was how to get there. He dozed off with the shipping list still in his hand, and slept peacefully.

In the morning he booked his passage by telephone, and for three whole days prior to the sailing he remained a voluntary prisoner in the hotel, drinking whiskies-and-sodas steadily, and only emerging from his seclusion an hour before the boat was timed to leave, and then to be driven direct to the dock in a covered vehicle. Once on board, he dived to

his cabin, where he bolted himself in and remained until the sounds on the deck above him told him they were off. With a delight that knew no bounds he saw the hated shores of the river glide past him, and with the feelings of a new man he emerged on deck. For the first few moments he gazed rather anxiously at each fresh person he met, but his fears were quite groundless.

It was comforting in the extreme to stand at the taffrail and watch the scenes of his terrors fade away behind, as the huge vessel made her way to the open sea. No less comforting was it to be among civilised folk again, to stand at a civilised bar, and he drew infinite pleasure in mingling with the throng of Europeans who paraded the deck of the *Oudh*. His spirits made him popular with his fellow-passengers, and the voyage was both pleasant and uneventful.

True, Wally experienced a taste of his past troubles during the time the boat put in at Colombo. The cinnamon-scented air that blew off-shore brought painful memories to him. He still had the thoughts of Eddie and Chunder at the back of his head, and he knew well that one or both of them might easily be

waiting to board that very boat. From a secluded point on the upper deck he watched the passengers embark, eagerly scanning each face for signs of trouble. But nothing happened, and in due course Ceylon, in its turn, followed India below the waves, and further anxiety was needless. For the first time in what seemed to him years, he felt the blessings of absolute safety.

And now he could give himself up entirely to the thoughts of the disposal of his gem, and he would sit for hours together in his deck-chair and gaze and think. It was the sight, among the accumulation of papers in his pocket-book, of a forgotten note—an unimportant affair relating to some picnic or other—that old van Bol had sent him during their stay at the bungalow, that gave him his first idea.

It was the Dutchman's signature that set the warped brain of the actor in motion. To this crooked mass of grey matter the copying of a signature was only forgery when attached to a cheque ; to sign a letter of introduction was not, perhaps, quite the thing, but one wouldn't call it forgery—oh, no.

For it had occurred to him that the brother

who kept the hotel in the Hoogstrat, at Rotterdam, might come in handy in connection with the scheme that was germinating, with criminal rapidity, in Wally's thoughts. And the result of it all was that the actor left the *Oudh* when she reached Marseilles, travelling direct by the P.L.M. to Paris. Arriving there, he took up his quarters at an unpretending hotel in the Boulevard Sebastopol and carefully made his preparations.

Wally's knowledge of French was elementary, but useful. It enabled him to dispose of another ruby at a comparatively fair price. It enabled him to procure a directory of Rotterdam, and to order a small quantity of notepaper, die-sunk with the address of the bungalow near Sinha-dam, upon a sheet of which, at a typewriting and translating office in the Faubourg Montmartre, he caused a letter to be written in Dutch. It began with the words, "My dear Brother," and at the end, with infinite care and with a precision worthy of a better cause, he copied the old Dutchman's signature. This completed his arrangements, as far as the French capital was concerned, and he allowed himself an evening off at the "Folies," and the next

morning steamed out of the Gare du Nord on his journey to Holland.

. . . . .

Old van Bol sat in the courtyard of the little hotel facing the quay at Sinha-dam, smoking and going through the correspondence which the newly-arrived boat had brought for him. The usual quarterly bustle was stirring up the little town. Near at hand sat the captain and the engineer, drinking Schnapps with the Resident. The dancing girls and fakirs elbowed in and out among the arrivals, laughing, chattering, and begging. The old snake-charmer was in his usual place in a corner of the courtyard, the notes of his pipe rising dismally in weird crescendos.

Van Bol paused in his occupation and sat watching the scene with pleasure shining in his mild old eyes. He was about to enjoy the treat of his life, the quarterly letter from his brother in the dear old land of windmills. He held it in his hand for a moment, as though desirous of prolonging the anticipatory pleasure. Then he slit the envelope.

For some time as he read, the expression of tranquil enjoyment remained on his face,

then his jaw dropped, and he read feverishly to the end. The closely-written pages of foreign paper slipped unheeded to the ground, and lay fluttering gently in the little breeze that blew up from the sea. For some few minutes he sat gazing blankly before him, then he reached down and picked up the letter. He began to read again, starting from the third page.

. . . I was delighted to meet Mr Burns, my dear brother, who came to me last month. When he handed me your letter of introduction I felt that I could not do enough for your friend. He told me the whole story of how the Rajah had decided to sell the "Moon of Valleys," and how he had consulted you about it. Burns is a curious little man, is he not? And you could not have chosen a better or more fitting messenger. No one could have possibly guessed that the fussy little individual was the emissary of the Rajah of Paran.

However, I did as you asked me to in your letter, and I sent him to a reliable lapidary in Amsterdam—you will remember him, a son of old Krentz. I have since heard from Burns, to the effect that the sale had come off all right and to his satisfaction.

And now as to the postscript of your letter, as to my commission. Your offer of five thousand gulden was indeed generous. You know that I would willingly have done what you wanted without payment, but as Mr Burns says the Rajah is paying the money, I have no hesitation in taking it. Mr Burns said he would have paid me out of the purchase money, but that he was expected to take it untouched to you. I have given orders to throw out a wing to my hotel here, and your gift will come in handy. I suppose it is now on its way to me. Again, many thanks . . .

Van Bol rose unsteadily and walked towards the hotel. The Resident nodded to him as he passed, but the Dutchman did not notice him. Cornelius van Weert ordered more Schnapps, and turning to the engineer said that he was afraid the old boy was breaking up fast.

CHAPTER XXIX

LEAH'S DIARY

I HATE the Earl of Epgrave — there, it's said. I really cannot see what Herbert has done for his father to regard him with such bitterness. That they had a violent quarrel on the journey they took together, from Ceylon to England, my husband admits, also that the bitterest words were used on both sides, and although that is over six years ago the breach has widened between them rather than otherwise.

Herbert and I arrived in London one evening in February, and made our way to the "Russell," where we stayed a week or two while we looked into our prospects. They were far from rosy, — I mean financially. My poor father's solicitor did all he could to make me take the very considerable fortune he had left, but I felt I could not touch it. I made it over then and there—half to an

Anglo-Indian charity, of whose good works I had heard a great deal, and half to a small hospital on the south coast. My mother's little fortune I felt no hesitation in keeping, but the income is only about one hundred and fifty a year, and the capital is so well and securely invested that touching the bulk of the money would be most unwise.

There were some arrears due to me, and Herbert had a little sum to draw from Mr Bradshaw, his solicitor, the accumulation of an allowance made him by his aunt. Together, therefore, we were fairly comfortable with what my husband made by his pen, but we soon left the palatial hotel in the Square for quarters more suited to our pockets. We found these in the Quebec Hotel in Museum Street.

We had been there about a month or a little over when Herbert received a letter which caused him to take a step that he had had in his mind for some little time—that of playing the part of the prodigal son, for my sake.

The letter I mention was from one of his editors, asking Herbert to proceed to Bir-

mingham, there to attend a political meeting on one of the burning questions of the day.

. . . I will send my car round for you at twelve to-morrow, and my chauffeur will run you up. It will make a little trip for Mrs Epgrave, if the weather holds. I also want you to go on to Manchester and interview Sir David Bennett on the results of the Birmingham meeting. He should be interesting. . . .

Herbert put down the letter and turned to me.

"Leah," he said, "look out your prettiest frock, and we'll take a taxi to Regent Street and get motor coats, and then——"

"And then—— ?" I said.

"Darling, our country seat is at Epgrave, and Epgrave is about five miles from Warwick, and Warwick is about twenty miles from Birmingham, and the car's a sixty horse-power, and—and if the old Earl can resist you in motor rig-out, I'm as much a Dutchman as dear old van Bol."

The prospect took my breath away. I knew that the ordeal must take place sooner or later, but to think that we were on the

threshold of the undertaking made me feel very nervous indeed.

Two hours later I was entering the tonneau of the magnificent car that stood throbbing before the hotel. Herbert looked awfully smart in his motor cap and a rough tweed coat from chin to heels. As for myself—well—I didn't know till afterwards that Herbert had given ten guineas for my coat. It was of mole-dyed squirrel with splendid fur on the cuffs and revers, and lined with quilted satin. Then I had one of those quaint-shaped Puritan bonnets that keep the ears so warm; and altogether we were splendidly equipped for our long trip.

It was a splendid morning, one of those exquisite spring days when everything seems as though viewed through crystal, clear and clean, and it was with a feeling of exhilaration and faith in the future that we leaned back on the luxuriant cushions as the great car purred its way out of London.

Never will I forget that glorious run. It seemed but a moment and we had left Euston and Camden Town and Hampstead, and were whirling along through Hendon. Away over Stanmore and the heights of Bushey, dipping

down through Watford's busy High Street, and so on to Berkhampstead, where we lunched.

We reached Birmingham about seven, or a little after. I was tired, and sat in the hotel writing and reading, whilst Herbert went to his meeting—a rather stormy one "with suffragette trimmings" to it, as he put it, and in the morning we prepared for the ordeal.

I don't think I am more vain than others of my sex, but, for Herbert's sake, I took great pains over my toilette—but it was so much time wasted, as far as the old Earl was concerned.

Epgrave Towers is an imposing place. I must admit that, although we were out of favour with its owner, I felt proud to think that I was connected with its turreted splendour. A river wound its way along one side, and from its edge the great walls rose in rugged grandeur, battlemented and flanked at either end by square towers. I caught but a glimpse of this as the car ran us through the well-kept grounds, pulling up at last before the noble front entrance to the house. Here the building seemed more modern and comfortable and not quite so forbidding, and my spirits rose considerably.

It had been agreed between us that Herbert should beard the old lion in his den, whilst I waited, seated in the car. As the brakes were applied he leant across and hurriedly kissed me, I saw the great doors swing open, the powdered heads of the footmen—and—then I waited with what patience I could command.

Herbert was back in five minutes, and I saw by his face that things were not well.

He slammed the door of the tonneau and gave his instructions to the chauffeur, "Warwick Arms Hotel," and then turned to me with a smile.

"Just our luck, dear, he's away at Mentone—we have a villa there, you know—facing the sea."

He turned away and looked across the sweeping lawns and shrubberies, and I knew that my boy was telling me a lie, and I honoured and loved him for it.

I took his hand and held it in mine for a little, and we didn't mention the subject again. From time to time, however, I saw him clench his fist and knew that he was swearing—also he drank two whiskies-and-sodas with his lunch.

Needless to say, the trip was not so pleasant to us after this, and I was not altogether sorry when we were back in Bloomsbury again.

And then our affairs took another turn.

I had been out one afternoon and was taking off my gloves in the bedroom when I heard Herbert's voice and—a woman's, in our sitting-room.

"I wouldn't let her know for the world," he was saying, "it would break her heart."

"Hearts don't break," snapped the woman's voice.

"Hers would, Aunt."

"Well, what *did* take place?"

"I went straight in to the old man—prodigal son sort of business. Said I had a wife outside, and he said it was the best place for her and me, too—I told him to go to the devil——"

I slipped downstairs again, and then came in as if I had heard nothing. Herbert didn't want me to know—so I did not want to let him think I did.

Aunt Angela received me very kindly. I could see at a glance that she was fond of Herbert, and I loved her right away. A neat

little lady, perhaps sixty years of age, dressed becomingly in black, relieved by tiny white ruffles, and wearing some magnificent sables.

Brusque in her manner, and at times cynical and even sarcastic, she had, as I found out, the kindliest heart in the world. Her affection for Herbert was a very deep one, and although her allowance to him was so small, it was all she dared do. To her mind it approached a wicked action, flying in the face of her brother's wishes.

What she really thought of the head of the house of Epgrave I could never make out, but to her the Earl's wishes were law. I believe if he had cut off the heads of all the tenantry she would have deplored it, but not questioned his right. Knowing this, I knew what it cost the old lady to even speak to one who was under the ban of her brother.

But with me it was different. I think she took to me at once, for within a week I was staying with her at her mansion at Brighton. I am to be here a month, and Herbert comes down at the week-ends, and to see Aunt Angela during his visits is really comical. Her delight at having him near her is apparent, but at times she looks out of the

window furtively, as though she were committing a great crime. I half expect she fears that the Earl may take it into his head to visit her.

I hate being separated from the dear fellow, but Aunt Angela's invitation was so sincere that we could not refuse. Herbert, too, is busy writing a play of which he hopes great things, and, although he will not say it, I expect he gets on faster without me.

My life here is very pleasant and well-ordered. Aunt entertains a good deal, mostly musical people, and the slight Bohemianism that characterises her 'at homes' makes them very delightful. We drive along the King's Road every afternoon in a splendid carriage and pair—the dear old lady detests motors—and I read to her in the evenings after dinner, until she falls asleep, which is generally in five minutes. When she wakes up we have bridge, for some one or other nearly always drops in. We go to all the best concerts at the Dome, and once we have been up to a London theatre, where Herbert joined us.

Dear Aunt Angela—how I wish the dissension in the noble house of Epgrave would end.

CHAPTER XXX

THE STRAND AGAIN

THE revolving doors of the Hotel Cecil turned, and from one of the segments emerged something very wonderful to look upon.

It was not tall, rather short in fact, but it walked with an air of importance that would not have been out of place in a six-foot guardsman.

It had on a tall hat that reflected the sunshine in a most dazzling manner, a grey frock overcoat that narrowed painfully at the waist, patent leather boots with cloth uppers, lemon-coloured gloves, and a tie that put Joseph's coat out of court for all time.

Walter Burns, Esquire, paused effectively on the top step, and lit a cigar for which he had just paid one-and-ninepence. The gold and crimson band that encircled it looked rather pretty, he thought, so he did not

remove it. He rather wished he could have kept on the silver paper in which the weed had been wrapped.

Wally swung his Malacca cane jauntily as he walked down the courtyard. He was humming to himself a song that he had once heard an American music-hall man sing.

All I want is a thousand million dollars,
A champagne fountain, sparklin' at my feet,
Mr Pierpont Morgan a-waitin' at the table,
And Kubelik a-fiddlin' while I eat.

Through the covered entrance way and across the Strand, up the little alley where the commissionaires are, and into Maiden Lane—and Rule's.

As he entered the well-known resort mixed feelings came to him. He wondered if Harry, the waiter, and the man at the little oyster bar remembered him. It seemed to him years since he had been there, but, after all, it couldn't be much more than six or eight months since Chunder had upset his glass of whisky.

He walked over to the spot where he had been sitting on that historic occasion and ordered a pint of champagne. It was early and the business of the day had hardly begun,

and he sat and sipped, and went over in his mind his recent wanderings and his newly-acquired wealth.

Since his arrival in London the conscience of Wally had begun to prick him a little. To still this he opened an account in the name of Edward Dockerty for one thousand pounds, writing anonymously to this effect to Eddie. He wrote four letters, one care of van Bol, another care of the Resident at Sinha-dam, another to the hotel at Colombo. The fourth was a bow drawn at a venture, and was addressed care of Itmad, Talabo.

Then Wally told himself he couldn't be expected to do any more for Eddie.

But the Honourable Herbert was another matter. Strange as it may seem, the little actor was genuinely fond of Epgrave, and he felt that there was more due to him than to Eddie. Also, he knew that the aristocrat would not touch a penny if Wally sent it to him. No, another way must be thought of if he wanted to do Herbert a good turn.

He came out of his reverie to find that the seats around him had been filling. Actors and actresses were in little groups, discussing the coming tours. A gentleman with an

astrachan collar to his coat was telling a pretty little woman in blue that he was going out with the "Giddy Girlie"—"forty weeks, my dear, No. 1 company. We open in a month—yes, I'll talk to Manders about you; I don't think he's full up."—"Missed it by a minute," a youth in a green waistcoat was saying to a youth in a red one; "old Dantin got the shop—passed me as I went out—have a drink?"—"Came a cropper at Middleham—hole of a place, not enough to go round on treasury."—"Not a stroke since Pantomime, my boy, too old at twenty-seven, what!"

Snatches of conversation such as these floated to Wally's ears as he sat sipping his champagne. He was still unrecognised; the glances that came his way were directed more at the golden-topped bottle than at him.

A moment more and a tall man appeared at the door. Well dressed and of an excellent carriage, he seemed to tower a head above the other occupants of the room. He caught sight of Wally and the recognition was mutual.

Charlie Morell was a player well up in the profession, so far as the provinces went. To northern audiences he was the ideal hero, and

he was perhaps wise in shunning London houses. A star part in a good touring company was more profitable than a minor rôle in town. For Wally he had a great affection.

It was Burns who had, in the first place, put him on his feet by an introduction to Broadhurst, the agent. That the little actor had done this from purely mercenary motives did not occur to him, and he would have put the thought from him as unworthy if it did. He went over to the little man and shook hands heartily as he sank into the seat beside him. He looked at the bottle.

"Why, Wally, my boy—what bird's been singing now?"

"Hello, Charlie. Bird singing? Yes, an old uncle, that is, he's stopped singing—hence these dibs. We'll have another bottle."

"Seems an age since I saw you, Wally, but I've been away a lot—tour lasted since August. By the way, I saw the Honourable Herbert yesterday—seems a bit of a reformed character these days. We had lunch together."

"Ah, yes—Herbert—what had he got to say?"

"Oh, I don't think he was as entertaining

as he used to be ; working like the very devil, he told me."

"Did he say what at ?"

"A play, three-act farcical comedy. From the bits he told me it seems pretty good. Indian sort of setting, splendid chance for a costume show. He's going to try his luck with old Mosenstein."

"At the 'Pantheon' ?"

"Yes, poor old boy ; he's had nothing on since 'The Girl from the West,' that has run for more than a month. I heard he wanted to sell the place. Perhaps Herbert's piece will change his luck."

And then the talk drifted into general channels. Two or three ladies joined the men, and the group at the little round table grew merry. Wally's gaiety was, however, of rather a forced order. For the most part his face wore a thoughtful look, and he was not sorry when Charlie took his departure and the two ladies with him.

As Wally walked out into the genial sunshine of Maiden Lane he felt a touch on his arm, and turning, saw the pathetic figure of a man—a man with a care-lined but handsome face. The hair, plentifully streaked

with grey, was rather long, and fell from under a shabby soft felt hat, on to the shoulders of a greasy frock-coat.

"Wally—by all that's wonderful!" The man looked at the prosperous figure, then, "Can I have a dollar, old man? It's the first time I've asked you—the wife's been bad, and——"

Mr Burns held up a protesting glove. "I never lend money," he said, and made as though to move on.

"But, Wally, old boy, you remember the old days. I lent you money every week when we were on that 'East Lynne' tour—every blessed week, Wally, and you've never lent me a penny in your life."

Wally's answer was: "My dear boy, as you know the world better, you will learn that an innovation is a different thing to a time-honoured custom. Good-bye, old boy."

Which reply goes to show that whatever kindness Wally Burns intended for Eddie Dockerty was born more of fear than of any inherent goodness of heart.

There were people who had said of Wally that he was not *all* bad—but he was as near it as any man may go.

All through a lonely lunch at his hotel a thoughtful frown showed on the little actor's face. An idea was slowly germinating in his brain, an idea whereby he could pay his debt to Herbert, and, detail by detail, it was shaping itself admirably.

His meal over, he hailed a taxi and was driven to the Pantheon Theatre, and marking a card ' urgent ' he sent it in to the lessee and manager, Mr Rudolph Mosenstein.

Mr Mosentein was a relic of the past as far as theatrical matters were concerned, and, having made his pile, had often expressed his wish to get out of it and leave the field open to younger men. He used to say that he had memories enough and to spare to live upon for the rest of his life.

The old Jew leant back in the chair before his desk as Wally entered. It was a cosy room, but lacked the brightness of the modern manager's sanctum. Stiff mahogany chairs were arranged at intervals along the wall, and above them were portraits of past favourites, for the most part dead and gone, whose names would hardly be remembered by the present-day playgoer.

Mr Mosenstein, too, had an air of the past

about him that was well in keeping with the room. His face, otherwise clean-shaven, was adorned on either side by small, trim whiskers which, together with the stock that he invariably wore, made a curious mid-Victorian picture.

He fingered Wally's card and looked his enquiries.

"You don't know my name, Mr Mosenstein —never seen it before, eh?"

The old gentleman looked again at the little piece of pasteboard.

"I think not, Mr Burns."

"Very well, then—I can state my business in very few words. I heard recently that you were open to let the 'Pantheon'—or even, to a suitable purchaser, sell it."

Mr Mosenstein smiled.

"The former, perhaps, Mr Burns, but not the latter." He gazed longingly round the room as he spoke. "I think I'd die if I thought I wasn't going to see all this any more."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Mr Mosenstein, because I'm a buyer. Now, as to the letting. What plans have you got on hand?"

The manager gave a little laugh. "When

in doubt, you know, play Shakespeare. I was thinking of opening with the 'Merry Wives' in October, but I'm not keen."

"'Merry Widows' pay better, eh! Well, then, it's a question of terms."

Wally drew his chair up to the desk and entered into close conversation with Mr Mosenstein. It was three o'clock before he rose and, buttoning up his coat, held out a hand.

"My solicitor will come round with me in the morning—we'll be here at eleven." He paused, with his hand on the door-knob. "You see, Mr Mosenstein, I was an actor myself once, and having a bit of cash I want to be in the thick of it."

The old fellow shook his head.

"I've been perfectly frank with you, Mr Burns. The 'Pantheon' is not what it was. I sometimes think I have got behind the times and am blaming the old theatre when I should be blaming myself. Perhaps you will do better; new methods, new——Well, good day, Mr Burns,—eleven o'clock."

Sharp to the hour the two men and their respective solicitors met, and in a remarkably short time the business was arranged, and

Walter Burns, Esquire, found himself lessee of the Pantheon Theatre in Compton Street for the space of one year.

Later in the day he was dining with a keen-faced young man in a private room at the "Cecil."

"——and so, Arthur, you take over the reins on Monday. I expect you will be having an MS. sent in by a Mr Epgrave in a day or so. 'Phone me when it comes and I will run over and go through it with you at once. Remember, that whatever happens, I do not appear in this at all; I don't want anybody to know I have anything to do with the 'Pantheon.' You will have absolute power. We'll mount Epgrave's play in such a way that it *can't* miss fire. But mind, not a word. You just go ahead, and I'll look in once or twice a week and sign the cheques."

CHAPTER XXXI

WALLY IS DRIVEN TO EXETER

IN a back room of the house by the docks old Agra sat and pondered heavily over a letter that had reached him that morning. It was from Chunder, and set forth in most lucid fashion the events that had been happening in Paran. The Cingalese did not enter into details as to how he had gained the knowledge of Wally's successful search, but his directions to the old Indian were explicit, and could admit of no misunderstanding. They were that Agra was to find Wally and hold him prisoner until his (Chunder's) return.

. . . luckily you know him, and will have little difficulty in the matter. He can no more keep away from the Strand than a bear can from honey. Sooner or later you'll spot him, and I leave the rest to you. All I want is to find him awaiting me when I return; I want him to be there to welcome me. I am

laid up at Sinha-dam with some cursed fever, and cannot travel by the boat which carries this letter. By the way, you must take care—he'll be a bit suspicious of dark-skinned men by now. . . .

Agra let the letter fall on to his knees, and remained stolidly gazing out over the chimney-pots, biting his nails.

He had served Chunder's father faithfully, and the service of the family was to him as a sacred thing. His late master—a recluse and student of Oriental literature—had never required the dirty work done that his son had been demanding for the last few years. But to the old Indian this was of no importance; a Chunder had commanded—the manner of the service was not *his* affair. He looked at the date on the letter and decided, with a sigh, that he must set about his task at once.

He was fortunate in securing a small bedroom in Maiden Lane that commanded a good view of that actors' thoroughfare, and, shielded behind the dingy curtain, he watched—and watched. Day in, day out, he sat and watched. And at last he was rewarded.

From an adjoining hostelry he saw the well-remembered figure of the little actor emerge,

in company with another man of about the same height. They stood on the pavement for some moments in animated conversation, then Wally walked away. His acquaintance stood where he had left him, and the look of malevolence with which he regarded the retreating figure gave the wily old Indian his cue. He watched until, with a gesture of disgust, the man on the pavement re-entered the hotel. A moment later Agra followed him.

It is not a difficult matter, the scraping of acquaintance in the bars beloved of 'the profession,' and a little lubricated diplomacy was the only weapon needed by the cunning old Oriental, and in a very few moments he was carrying on a desultory conversation with the man whom he had followed into the cosy little bar.

There are two men in this world who are ever ready to talk; one is an actor, the other a man with a grievance. The combination of the two is the limit in loquacity, and so it fell out that Agra had to do little more than listen, while Reginald d'Arcy poured forth his tale of woe. The old man knew that so long as the cash register kept up its tinkling

accompaniment to his sympathy the mummer would not stop.

"I should say it *was* hard lines," he was saying, "swotting at the part for weeks—then getting the push. Epgrave, that's the author, you know, says I'm fine in the character—it absolutely suits me—but I've just left the boss, and he says he's going to take the part himself on the night."

Agra nodded and let him go on.

"Seems to me, the boss is afraid to meet Epgrave; directly he shows up at rehearsal the other 'ops it, lively."

"And if this, what you call 'poss' were ill—if he sick—then?"

"No such luck, old man, he's too set on his little game, whatever it is."

The man with the grievance needed no encouragement, and the details that escaped him gave old Agra all the information he desired. When he at last bade the actor "good-bye," he knew all he wanted to know. From that time Wally was a marked man.

The tragedy itself happened when Wally was making his way home from his club. He was far too full of his schemes to notice that the taxi-cab he patronised was one that had

never been far from him for the last few days—if he had looked well he would have seen its many differences from the regular taxi. He felt annoyed that the engines should cease working on a deserted part of the Embankment, and more annoyed when the chauffeur opened the door and, under the pretence of searching for a spanner beneath the seat, asked Wally to stand up.

He had a confused memory of seeing another man mount the driving-seat—the rattle of gear, and of being pressed back on the cushions, his throat encircled by sinewy fingers.

When he awoke he was in his old quarters high up in the house by the docks. This time, however, elaborate precautions had been taken to ensure his silence; a filthy gag covered his mouth, and his hands and feet were knotted together by a short length of rope which ended at a staple firmly driven into the wall. On a couch in the corner lay a rough-looking fellow in whom Wally had no difficulty in recognising the driver of the taxi. In a flash he remembered the face as that of the man who had driven Chunder and himself more than once on the day preceding

their departure to the East. He found himself idly wondering why it was that Chunder had such a man in his pay, then, as the utter hopelessness of his position came home to him, he ceased wondering about it any more.

The thought that he was in Chunder's hands was a terrible one and took up all his energy. The Cingalese, as Wally knew, had a nasty way of settling his scores.

As he lay in the stillness he could hear the ticking of his watch in his vest pocket, and he knew by the fact of its not having run down that but little time had elapsed since his abduction. A crazy little clock on the mantelpiece pointed to three o'clock, and with a pang that wrung a groan from his parched lips he remembered that it was the night of the production.

The thought that his absence would cause a search to be made gave him but little comfort. He knew the position of the house he was in and the impossibility of his being traced; no one would think of——

The man on the couch stirred and turned a leering face to him. Then he rose, stretched himself, and went downstairs, returning almost immediately with a dish of unappetising

stew and a pot of cheap beer. Hungry as Wally was he could not touch the food, but the beer, although a very different tipple to that he had been used to lately, revived him somewhat, and he put a few pertinent questions to his jailer.

He could learn but one thing. He had been brought there to meet a gentleman who was returning from the East ; he might arrive in a few weeks—it might be months.

As the days passed, Wally lost all count of them ; each morning dawned more hopelessly than the last, and he found himself wishing that Chunder would indeed arrive, so that he might know his fate.

It was late one afternoon when the well-remembered little figure entered the room accompanied by Agra, and taking a seat opposite the actor, smiled.

" Well, Wally, my boy ; it's good of you to be here to meet me."

Wally did not answer and the Cingalese went on :

" I said, Mr Burns, that it's good of you to be here to meet me—and yet, somehow, you don't seem any too pleased now I've come."

Still no answer. Chunder looked at his watch.

"Our friend with the car will be here at six o'clock, Wally. We're going into the country together——"

"The country?" Wally's voice sounded husky.

"Yes, Devonshire—I'm—going to drive you to Exeter, Mr Burns."

. . . . .

Late on the following afternoon a car containing Chunder and Wally rattled over the cobbled streets of Axminster. It was a small private car, denuded of its taxi disguise, and driven by our friend the driver in a smart livery of dark green. Through the grass-grown streets of the little Devonshire town, taking the road leading to Uplyme, sped the little car, then turned off on an unfrequented road. It encircled a spur of gorse-grown hill and so takes Wally Burns out of this story.

The actor's disappearance was a nine days' wonder to only two people, the manager of the "Pantheon" and Reginald d'Arcy. The former, armed with his power of attorney, and the latter appearing nightly in a success-

ful part, found themselves in a position that gave them little time for other people's troubles. One or two members of the company idly wondered why the little man they had seen at rehearsals did not come any more —and that was all.

Mosenstein had left London on a long holiday, and altogether the little actor had, in his anxiety to spring a surprise on Herbert, covered up his tracks only too well.

During the next month cheques payable to bearer were cashed at Wally's bank by a young dark-skinned man, who also called at the "Cecil" with a note authorising him to remove Mr Burns's luggage, and pay Mr Burns's bill.

Really, Mr Wally Burns was not greatly missed.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE EARL

THE elaborate railings of Aunt Angela's balcony were painted a rich brown, and one could almost have imagined the little pair of high-heeled absurdities in bronze kid that rested on the lower rail to be part and parcel of the delicate tracery—were it not for the fact that no craftsman could have hoped to work such daintiness in mere metal.

Leah looked charming in an evening gown of old rose chiffon, as she sat hand-in-hand with her husband, enjoying the glories of evening on the south coast. Sea seemed to meet sky in a dusky splendour, in which little boats hung at anchor. Away to the west the lights of Worthing were twinkling out, showing like a bar brooch of diamonds in a gown of blue velvet.

Into their pleasant hour swept Aunt Angela. She was in a piteous state of nerves. A huge

wicker chair yawned invitingly, and into its cushioned support sank the agitated old lady.

She fanned herself vigorously, gasping out her news.

"I—I've seen him."

"Who, Aunt?"

"Your father, Herbert, the Earl. Barker—the groom, you know—was up at the station when the five o'clock from London Bridge came in, and saw the Earl get out of a Pullman. Barker telephoned me at once, and kept out of his way. Herbert, you must fold up your tents. He mustn't see you here for the world; he'd never forgive me."

"The old boy at Brighton—that means gout."

"Now, Herbert, I won't have you speak of the Earl in that way. Be more respectful. Now—there's a back door to this house—I'll send your things on to the 'Metropole.' All you need now is your coat."

The old lady was pushing her nephew back into the room, followed by Leah. Tears were gathering in the girl's eyes as she saw the termination of her pleasant time with her husband, and she hated the Earl of Epgrave more than ever.

She would have gone with him, but Aunt Angela wouldn't hear of it. Leah would be most useful in entertaining her brother—how could she think of leaving her?

"Entertaining! Good lord—he'll need a bit of entertaining, if he's got gout." Herbert was scrambling into his overcoat as, accompanied by Leah, he made his way through the passages to the back door of the mansion, leading into a narrow side street.

"Rotten luck, isn't it, Leah? It's you I'm thinking of—I'll be all right; Garrett, you know, the manager at the 'Pantheon,' is at the 'Metropole.' I'll be on the West Pier at eleven, three, and six each day looking for you." An angry jangle of bells pealed through the house. "That's he, dear—I told you it was gout. One more, darling——"

And the Honourable Herbert Epgrave turned up his collar, and made his way eastward to the "Metropole," where he booked a room. Garrett, he learnt, had just gone out, but Herbert was lucky in running his man, Charles, to earth later in the Bodega, and from him was able to trace the manager's movements.

It was not until they were smoking a last

pipe at their hotel that Herbert put a question which had been in his mind since the first night of the production of his play.

"About the costumes, Garrett; I wish you'd ask Clarkson, when you see him, where he got that design for the comedian's dress, I mean the white one with the yellow pipings and the little round hat with the green button on top."

The manager of the "Pantheon" took a pull at his whisky-and-soda, and after a moment's silence said:

"It's a curious story, Mr Epgrave, and one that I can't make head or tail of. A little actor I used to meet on tour ages back, Burns his name was, came to me a few months ago, flush as they make 'em. There seemed no end to his money—said an aunt of his had died or something. It was him who put up the needful to produce your show. He intended playing the part himself in that dress on the first night—said he had his reasons, private ones—but all through it he wouldn't let his name appear."

Garrett paused for a moment, but Herbert merely nodded. In the Honourable's eyes

showed a lively interest. The manager went on.

"Now comes the strange part. After shelling out to the extent he did he disappeared,—a week, that was, before the first night. You see, he had kept himself so secret in every way that it was hopeless to try and trace him. They knew no more than we did at the 'Cecil.'

"Only d'Arcy and myself knew of his existence, except Mosenstein. The rest of the company had seen him watching at rehearsals from the stalls, learning his part that way, but they didn't miss him. He gave me full power to act for him financially, and there's a fortune waiting him out of the box-office receipts. I suppose he'll turn up one of these days."

"Didn't you enquire at his bank?"

"*I* did all the business at the theatre's bank, and I didn't know his private one—and he told me his money ran into six figures."

Herbert sat silent for a moment.

"Have you seen any Indian-looking gentlemen about lately?" he asked suddenly. "I have a reason for asking."

"Well—yes—you see the setting of the

play draws the Indians in London to the theatre. I suppose we average half a dozen a night. Why do you ask ? "

But the Honourable Herbert passed off the question, and shortly afterwards the two men turned in to bed.

. . . . .

Two weeks later business connected with an alteration in the second act took Herbert into the wings of the " Pantheon " during the performance. From where he was he could see a small corner of the stall area—the last few seats of the first rows.

As he looked idly at the gleaming mass of shirt-fronts and shoulders something seemed to chain his attention. He started forward, only remembering himself in time. Another instant and he would have made his first and only appearance on the stage. As it was he dropped the prompt-book he had been holding, and the slight movement caught the eye of a little dark-skinned gentleman who was seated at the end of the second row of stalls. He raised his head and for a moment the two men regarded one another. Then Herbert drew back out of the range of the black eyes.

By the time he could make his way round to the front of the house he found an empty stall. The occupant had evidently left hurriedly, for a folded opera hat was still upon the seat. Herbert picked it up and looked at a name that was just inside the brim.

"I thought so," he said, and went in search of Garrett. He found him in the circle bar and drew him away, out on to one of the little stone balconies. "I think I know the solution of *l'affaire Burns*," he said. "I think, also, that we can call that money you spoke of our own. Mr Burns owes me a bit, you see. He owes a good many men a bit, and I fancy he must have met one of them lately who will require payment in full. I somehow think that none of us will see Wally Burns again. I know enough of a certain man I have seen to-night to know that it is useless to search for him."

And so the little actor's wish to do Herbert a good turn came off, and it is to be hoped stood to his credit in his final reckoning.

Herbert had some scruples in profiting by his enemy's downfall, but there—if he didn't take the money, who would? Wally had never mentioned a relation, or Epgrave would

have sought them out. As it was, the Actors' Benevolent Fund received an anonymous gift that did more good than Mr Walter Burns could have done in a lifetime.

CHAPTER XXXIII

RECONCILIATION

"DAMITAL—I'm only sixty-two."

Angela Epgrave looked up from her embroidery as her brother spoke. Her expression was non-committal.

"—— or is it sixty-one? Hale, hearty, sound as a bell of brass, if it wasn't for this infernal—ugh! you brute." This last to a slippered foot that reclined at its ill-ease on a low cushioned chair before him.

His sister returned to her embroidery and said nothing. Her thoughts were busy—very busy, and very disquieting.

For the five days that the old Earl had been with her she had played with sympathetic touch upon the chords of the heart that she knew still held affection for her favourite nephew.

And with good effect. Little by little the old man had relented,—the success of his

son's play, the favourable reports as to his mode of life, had gradually beaten down the old aristocrat's pride. The fact of Herbert's marriage was kept a secret until Aunt Angela should deem his father in a fit state to receive the momentous news. To this end Leah had been introduced to him as Miss Woolf.

The poor old lady sighed as she bent over her needle to think that all her carefully laid plans should come tumbling to the ground. For the noble Earl of Epgrave had done Leah the honour to fall in love with her. The disparity in their ages did not occur to the old aristocrat as an insurmountable obstacle, seeing that he was giving an ancient name and forty thousand a year in exchange for the hand of a dowerless girl.

Aunt Angela looked at the clock. Herbert would be here in a few moments for *the* interview with his father. No doubt when that was settled the Earl would lose no time in pressing his suit with Leah. It is as well not to waste time over love affairs when one is sixty-two.

With the feelings of a conspirator against the State at her heart, the good lady gathered

up her impossible fancy work, and murmuring some slight excuse, ascended to her boudoir on the floor above. As she reached the landing a knock came up from the hall door.

She heard Herbert arrive, and leant over the banisters until the library door had closed behind him. Then she rang for a cup of strong tea, and waited.

An hour passed before she again heard the library door open and shut. She summoned her maid, and enquired if Mr Herbert had gone. Celeste bowed and withdrew, returning in a moment with the news that he was still in the library, and that they had just rung for a bottle of champagne.

"Thank God," said Aunt Angela, and took up her neglected fancy work.

In the room below, two men were chinking glasses. Their faces shone with a great content. They had done with the matter in hand, and the conversation had dropped into commonplaces,—the weather, Colombo, the play,—when the Earl suddenly remembered Leah.

He told his son of his hopes, and as he omitted to mention the lady's name, they were hopes which Herbert unfeignedly shared.

Anything that would bring happiness to his father's last years was near to his son's heart.

The name at last slipped out, leaving the newly reconciled pair hopelessly at cross-purposes.

"——you see, Herbert, my boy, Leah will be the Countess of Epgrave."

The Honourable Herbert started. Evidently Aunt Angela had told of his marriage, and he felt glad that the task of the telling had been taken off his shoulders.

"I hope, sir, that it will be a *very* long time before she's that."

He thought it was rather a pretty thing to say—a delicate way of wishing the old Earl long life, and he was more than taken aback at the storm the remark brought forth.

"You damned impudent young puppy, you——" the Earl stuttered, and leant across for the stick that he kept handy by his chair.

"But, sir—we wish you to live a long time, Leah and I. You don't think surely that——"

"Leah and *you*—and pray, what is Miss Woolf to you?"

"Look here, sir, I don't understand.

There is no Miss Woolf now, she's the Honourable Mrs Epgrave—my wife."

. . . . .

Again Aunt Angela heard the library door open and shut—or rather bang. The anger of the Earl came up to her in little screams. From her window she saw her nephew leave the house—saw the Earl out on the balcony below beckoning to him to come back. She saw Herbert turn and look at him, then re-enter the house.

. . . . .

"It's no good, my boy, we can't quarrel again. I must take my luck. Sixty-two, Herbert, and I feel every week of it—this morning I didn't. I'm glad—yes, I'm glad things are as they are. If I had let you go, you would never have come back, and I would have been again the miserable man I have been these seven years. No, don't interrupt me—Angela has acted wrongly in deceiving me, but that's between her and me. I'll forgive her because she has brought us together again. The Towers has been dull of late, my boy, the Epgrave pride has made it so. But that's all over. Thank goodness I

haven't spoken to Leah ; run away and tell your aunt if she ever breathes a word about my elderly love affair she shan't be buried in the Epgrave vault. There's the dressing-bell—send Johnson to me as you go up."

CHAPTER XXXIV

AT EPGRAVE TOWERS

FROM the road that winds round the base of Epgrave Towers the wooded park slopes gradually upwards, terminating in a series of levelled lawns that terrace up to the house itself.

It was drowsy August, and on the lower lawn that met the edge of the park Herbert lay at full length, asleep. Leah, in a simple muslin frock, was sunk in the flaming orange cushions of a huge wicker chair. She was reading, ever and again raising her head to glance to where a trim nurse was wheeling a smart white perambulator to and fro on the gravelled walks.

The year that had passed since the reconciliation, and the happiness it had brought, had made Leah, perhaps, more beautiful than ever. One had only to ask the villagers in the little hamlet that nestled yonder in a cloud of

foliage, what they thought of the new lady at the big house to understand the look of unalloyed joy that beamed in the girl-wife's lovely eyes.

It was very peaceful in this corner, where the afternoon sun threw the mottled shadow of leaves over her book. The air was sweet with the scent of the woods, a wasp droned musically over the silver cake-basket on the little table—a very picture of indecision. From a field far below, in the valley, came the rhythmic whir of a self-binder at work. One could just make out the flying arms of the machine as it crept up the hill-side. Beyond, a truly English pastoral landscape marked a curious chessboard pattern as far as the line of blue hills that bounded the horizon.

Leah's eyes closed, and her head drooped over her book. When she looked up again she knew she must have slept, for the blue of the distant hills had turned to grey, and the binding machine was silent.

She turned to her husband—he was sitting up reading a letter, while across the lawn a footman was carrying an empty salver back to the house. For a moment she watched Herbert, trying to make out the meaning of

his expression as he read. He folded the note and looked up.

"Forty winks, eh, dear? Both in the same boat that time, what!"

"Who's the letter from?"

For the smallest fraction of a second Herbert hesitated, then:

"There's a man, dearie, I used to know, staying at the Castle Inn and wants to see me. I'll run down as I am, dear, before dinner."

"Why doesn't he come up here?"

"Well, you know, Leah, some of my friends of the old days were not quite—well, you know. You trust me to do what's right. By the way, are we alone to-night? May I bring him up to dinner if I want to?"

"But Herbert, dear, who is this man?"

The Honourable Herbert leant over and screwed her little face up in his two hands, so that her mouth took the shape of a newly opened bud.

"Patience is a virtue, little woman," he said, and kissed the lips.

Then he took the woodland path that led down to the village.

The Castle Inn lay a little off the high-road,

and faced the triangular patch of springy turf upon which the youth of the village upheld the cricket traditions of Stoke Epgrave. It differed little from the thousand and one such hostelries that lie scattered up and down this merry land of ours, and in point of solid comfort was second to none of them.

In the little room behind the bar Eddie Dockerty stood looking over the red curtains on to the stable yard, and waiting for an answer to his note. Outdoor life and a tropical sun had worked great changes in the man who set out with Reuben Woolf in quest of the "Moon of Valleys." That things had prospered with him there could be little doubt, the cut of the tweed suit and the gleam in his cravat spoke eloquently as to this.

He was humming a tune softly as he watched the languid life of the yard.

The door of the bar opened and Dockerty turned on his heel and held out his hand somewhat hesitatingly.

Herbert walked quickly forward and grasped it heartily. "I *am* glad," he said.

"I hoped you would be, Epgrave—I couldn't go back without seeing you. I

wanted to hear all about you—and Mrs Epgrave."

"Leah's all right, Eddie, as you'll see for yourself when you come up to dinner to-night."

Dockerty shook his head.

"No time, and, after all, it's just as well not; I'm having the 6.15 stopped for me at Hinton, and the ostler out there is shutting in the horse for the cab."

"But why this hurry?"

"To get back to Talabo. The Colombo boat leaves London to-morrow morning, and you know what the connection is like the other end. I'm doing rather well out there"—he smiled a little—"and honestly, too."

"What, treasure-hunting still or planting?"

"Neither; I've got a crib. I'm High Muck-a-Muck to his Highness the Rajah. I met the old boy after the 'Moon of Valleys' fiasco, and he rather took to me. He's an interesting and intellectual old ruffian at heart, and I've instilled some Western ideas into him, and he wants more. I'm over here now about telephones for the harem. You'd laugh to see me in my robes; gorgeous isn't the word. I'm Commander-in-Chief—Vizier and

everything, and worth a mint of money. I thought you'd like to know."

"Have you heard anything of Wally?"

"Yes,—that is, not directly, but old van Bol would give a bit to meet him; he let the old fellow in for hundreds." And Eddie went on to relate the history of the disposal of the emerald.

"I saw Chunder a year ago, Eddie, and Wally disappeared suddenly about the same time. I expect they had it out at last. Alive or dead, I don't think we'll hear much more of Mr Walter Burns."

The rickety old cab rumbled heavily over the cobble-stones of the yard, and Eddie took up his umbrella and overcoat from the table.

"You're quite sure you can't stay with us a bit?" said the other.

"Quite. I'm not my own master. My respects to Mrs Epgrave."

Herbert stood and watched the cloud of dust as the vehicle breasted the hill. At the summit Eddie leant out and waved his hand.

Then the cab dipped out of sight.

THE END

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